



# March Team Ministry

**March Team St John, St Mary, St Peter, St Wendreda**

## *Welcome*

### Fifth Sunday of Epiphany ~ 7th January 2021

Please keep in touch with one another, and I am always glad to hear from you on 01354 279232 or at [andrew.marchurch@gmail.com](mailto:andrew.marchurch@gmail.com)

**The rules for Church services have not changed under this lockdown, but with the rise in infections everyone is asked to be especially vigilant. For some people a greater degree of isolating is sensible. No one should feel pressurised in to attending church**

We have Church services with social distancing, and also, for the foreseeable future, our zooming, emailing and leaflet deliveries. We want people to have a genuine choice. We are also trying to allow other aspects of the church's life to happen. Ideas and suggestions welcome.

St Peter's Sundays 8am & 11am; Wednesdays 10am

St Mary's Sundays 9.15am

St John's Sundays 9.30am; Tuesdays 10am

On Ash Wednesday, 17th February,  
we will have services in St Peter's 10am and St John's 7pm.

"Stay in touch, take care, keep safe, continue praying and God bless."

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### Prayers for this Week

God of tenderness, desire of the human heart, you led your people into the desert and made them your own in love and fidelity. By this word and sacrament renew with us your covenant of love, so that, forsaking the ways of the past, we may embrace the new life of the kingdom. We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, praying for the inspiration of your Holy Spirit.

**Amen**

God of the wrong crowd, sharing bread with the unwanted and imperfect: take our pious disdain, fill us with new wine, that we may be transformed in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, the physician.

**Amen**

## **Ruth 1 v1-18**

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there for about ten years, both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons or her husband.

Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had had consideration for his people and given them food. So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, ‘Go back each of you to your mother’s house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The LORD grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband.’ Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. They said to her, ‘No, we will return with you to your people.’ But Naomi said, ‘Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the LORD has turned against me.’ Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. So she said, ‘See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.’ But Ruth said, ‘Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried. May the LORD do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!’ When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

## **Gospel of St Mark 2 v13-22**

Jesus went out again beside the lake; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them. As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And he got up and followed him.

And as he sat at dinner in Levi’s house, many tax-collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many who followed him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax-collectors, they said to his disciples, ‘Why does he eat with tax-collectors and sinners?’ When Jesus heard this, he said to them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.’

Now John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people came and said to him, ‘Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?’ Jesus said to them, ‘The wedding-guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day. ‘No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.’

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## **Meditation**

In Church this week we shall hear the opening of the book of Ruth, and it is a shame that we cannot have the whole story. It is a love story with a happy ending, but it begins with tragedy.

A Bethlehem family migrates, because of famine, to a foreign land, Moab. The father dies, and the two sons marry local women. The two sons too then die, leaving three widows. The older woman, Naomi, decides to return to her home land for there seems to be no future in this foreign land; they had migrated for a better life and survival, but have been caught up in tragedy and death.

Ironically, Naomi has heard that there has been a reversal and now it is Bethlehem that has food. Naomi tells her two daughters-in-law that they can have a future amongst their own people. They are young enough to build a new life. Naomi is too old. One of the widowed daughters-in-law tearfully takes the advice, but the other, Ruth, clings to her with an impassioned plea of affection and loyalty; ‘your people shall be my people, and your God my God.’ People and God, (YHWH)

The rest of the book of Ruth (***Go on - read it!***) recounts that they returned destitute and begging, to Bethlehem. There, Naomi plots a future for herself and Ruth by enabling Ruth to encounter and marry a kinsman, Boaz, to redeem the family land and provide heirs and a future. And of course those heirs provide significance for the history and nation of Israel, as the Moabite Ruth’s great-grandson will be King David, the founder of the royal dynasty.

You will find the book of Ruth in our bound bibles in the logical place where the events are set. It is the time in Israel’s history, after the settlement in the Holy Land, following the Exodus from slavery in Egypt, and before the conquest of Jerusalem and the setting up of a nation state with King and Temple under David and his son Solomon. So it is directly after the Book of Judges and before 1 Samuel. However, it was composed later in a different situation, and set in this era, much as we might write a historical novel, or even reflect on the events of history and what they may mean for political, social and individual lives now.

It may have been written about the time that David’s son Solomon was king, when the population was a great mixture of Baal believers (a fertility and war local God), foreigners who had not converted, and YHWH believers.

The book of Ruth supports the view that those who believe in YHWH believe that it is possible to accept people who are different, like foreigners, into one’s own people. Just as the Moabite Ruth opted for YHWH and his people, so anyone different can opt too. But the book of Ruth goes further, since it shows that those who believe in YHWH can learn from such a person. The book of Ruth criticizes those who hate their next-door neighbours and foreigners, and think that YHWH supports this discrimination. It pleads for a life in YHWH without frontiers and calls on those who believe in God to be open to other and different people. Are they not themselves foreigners in origin? Certainly, this message will have sounded challenging to the powerful among its hearer and readers. For them it was easier to treat the others as transients and to regard themselves as permanent. They give priority to going back to the rock of their own certainty and identity. Openness to newcomers, who have different clothing, habits, and customs, is not so attractive to YHWH believers in the Kingdom of Solomon, and often not to others also. Why should they give up what they have?

The story of Ruth is told in order to show that YHWH is a God who calls everyone, whether or not they believe in YHWH. This is a summons to those who don’t believe in YHWH to do so, and to those who do, to alter their behaviour. ‘Go, go’ this YHWH keeps saying.’ Go yourself, God’ will be what most people will have thought. But those who believe in YHWH sense that they must go and let the others, the foreigners and the outsiders, stay. Ruth is a somewhat disconcerting book for those who want to keep the doors closed, who want to remain and keep everything for themselves. That is true not only for the times of Solomon, but also for later times. Again and again this book of Ruth could be, and can be, read as a stimulus to throw open the doors of one’s own existence.

It could be that the book was written much later after the people of YHWH had been exiled to Babylon, and then a small remnant had been allowed to return. As small and insignificant people they felt their culture was threatened, and so turned on in themselves, emphasising obedience to customs of food, routine, and clothing to keep their identity. Furthermore, any taking of foreign customs seemed to threaten their identity; especially, mixed marriage became abhorrent and should lead to exclusion from the people of YHWH. The book of Ruth challenges the notion that the people of God should be select and holy and we do not need to defend its frontiers. King David and all the royals have foreign ancestry. Abraham and Sarah were foreigners converted to belief in YHWH. Rachel and Leah, from near Babylon, also became ancestral mothers of Israel; equally, Tamar, who we looked at a few weeks ago, and Bathsheba next week.

Boaz, whom Ruth marries, is portrayed as the ideal Israelite who knows YHWH. He sees that to know YHWH is not the formal ritual of rule and sacrifice, but to care for the poor, individually and structurally; to honour justice, take women seriously, and make the system work for the good of all. The Book of Ruth, which radiates inner harmony and power, and contrasts this rest and inner equilibrium with cleansings and phobias. From now on people can no longer say, ‘We don’t know how other people see things’, from now on we need to listen to people who are different and look at them, as YHWH himself has listened to them and looked at them when they were foreigners and marginalised.

**God bless, Andrew**

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**Note. Much of the inspiration about the Book of Ruth came from “Ruth and Naomi” by Ellen van Wolde.**

## Prayers, The Litany

Minister: God the Father;

**All: have mercy on us.**

Minister: God the Son;

**All: have mercy on us.**

Minister: God the Holy Spirit;

**All: have mercy on us.**

Minister: Holy, blessed and glorious Trinity

**All: have mercy on us.**

Minister: From all evil and mischief;  
from pride, vanity, and hypocrisy;  
from envy, hatred and malice;  
and from all evil intent,

**All: good Lord, deliver us.**

Minister: From sloth, worldliness and love of money;  
from hardness of heart  
and contempt for your word and your laws,

**All: good Lord, deliver us.**

Minister: From sins of body and mind;  
from deceits of the world, the flesh, and evil,

**All: good Lord, deliver us.**

Minister: In all times of sorrow;  
in all times of joy;  
in the hour of our death,  
and at the day of judgement,

**All: good Lord, deliver us.**

Minister: By the mystery of your holy incarnation;  
by your birth, childhood and obedience;  
by your baptism, fasting, and temptation,

**All: good Lord, deliver us.**

Minister: By your ministry in word and work;  
by your mighty acts of power;  
and by your preaching of your kingdom,

**All: good Lord, deliver us.**

Minister: By your agony and trial;  
by your cross and passion;  
and by your precious death and burial,

**All: good Lord, deliver us.**

Minister: By your mighty resurrection;  
by your glorious ascension;  
and by your sending of the Holy Spirit

**All: good Lord, deliver us.**

Minister: Hear our prayers, O Lord our God,

**All: Hear us good Lord.**

Minister: Govern and direct your holy Church;  
fill it with love and truth;  
and grant it that unity which is your will.

**All: Hear us good Lord.**

Minister: Give us boldness to preach the gospel in all the world,  
and make disciples of all the nations.

**All: Hear us good Lord.**

Minister: Enlighten Stephen and Dagmar, our Bishops, and all who minister,  
with knowledge and understanding,  
that by their teaching and their lives they may proclaim your word.

**All: Hear us good Lord.**

Minister: Give your people grace to hear and receive your word,  
and to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit.

**All: Hear us good Lord.**

Minister: Bring into the way of truth all who have erred and are deceived.

**All: Hear us good Lord.**

Minister: Strengthen those who stand:  
comfort and help the faint hearted;  
raise up the fallen;  
and finally beat down evil under our feet.

**All: Hear us good Lord.**

Minister: Guide the leaders of the nations into the ways of peace and justice.

**All: Hear us good Lord.**

Minister: Guard and strengthen your servant Elizabeth our Queen,  
that she may put her trust in you,  
and seek your honour and glory.

**All: Hear us good Lord.**

Minister: Endue the High Court of Parliament and all ministers of the Crown  
with wisdom and understanding.

**All: Hear us good Lord.**

Minister: Bless those who administer the law,  
that they may uphold justice, honesty and truth.

**All: Hear us good Lord.**

Minister: Give us the will to use the resources of the earth to your glory,  
and for the good of all creation.

**All: Hear us good Lord.**

Minister: Bless and keep all your people.

**All: Hear us good Lord.**

Minister: Bring your joy into all families;  
strengthen and deliver those in childbirth,  
watch over our children and guide the young,  
bring reconciliation to those in discord  
and peace to those in stress.

**All: Hear us good Lord.**

Minister: Help and comfort the lonely, the bereaved and the oppressed.

**All: Lord have mercy.**

Minister: Keep in safety those who travel and all who are in danger.

**All: Lord have mercy.**

Minister: Heal the sick in body and mind,  
and provide for the homeless, the hungry and the destitute.

**All: Lord have mercy.**

Minister: Show your pity on prisoners and refugees,  
and all who are in trouble.

**All: Lord have mercy.**

Minister: Forgive our enemies, our persecutors and slanderers,  
and forgive their hearts.

**All: Lord have mercy.**

Minister: Hear us as we remember those who have died in the peace of Christ  
both those who have confessed the faith  
and those whose faith is known to you alone  
and grant us with them a share in your eternal kingdom.

**All: Lord have mercy.**

Minister: Give us true repentance:  
forgive us our sins of negligence and ignorance  
and our deliberate sins:  
and grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit  
to amend our lives according to your holy word.

**All: Holy God, holy and strong, holy and immortal,  
have mercy on us.**