

Sunday 21st June 2020 – Bible Month Week 3

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. If you are well enough why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Opening Prayer

You may like to be still, light a candle, listen to a calming piece of music as we gather in worship.

*‘The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.’
(Lamentations 3:22-23)*

Holy God, as we come to worship you, help us to remember, that though apart, we belong to your church, your people, your world, we are not alone. Draw us together by your Spirit as we worship. Amen.

Hymn: Christ whose glory fills the skies (StF 134)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4FpmaYlluuA>

Christ, whose glory fills the skies,
Christ, the true, the only Light,
Sun of Righteousness, arise,
triumph o’er the shades of night;
Day-spring from on high, be near;
Day-star, in my heart appear.

Dark and cheerless is the morn
Unaccompanied by thee;
joyless is the day’s return,
till thy mercy’s beams I see,
till they inward light impart,
glad my eyes, and warm my heart.

Visit then this soul of mine;
pierce the gloom of sin and grief;
fill me, radiance divine;
scatter all my unbelief;
more and more thyself display,
shining to the perfect day.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Let us pray together:

Holy God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, life and love and hope. In the creative cover of darkness, you formed your creation until the time when your light burst forth, illuminating the beauty, vibrancy and wonder of all that you have made. May we your beloved people encounter you, in the spectacular and in the mundane. Ever-creating God, meet afresh with us as we come to worship.

God of transformation, in love you sent your Son to live among your people, to enter the frailty of human flesh. Befriending the ‘wrong’ sort of people, Jesus, powerfully proclaimed your message. Jesus demonstrated the depth and breadth of your great love, love too strong to be bound and held by death, love that burst forth from a tomb with the rising sun.

Holy Spirit of God, love and laughter, creativity, dance and song, you call us continually into relationship with you and one another. In this time of challenge, of fear and uncertainty, encourage us to look for signs of you at work all around us.

Holy God, we come also to ask your forgiveness... (Time of quiet prayer)

Our liberating God of love, hope and peace calls us afresh to serve in the work of the kingdom, forgives us in Christ, renews, inspires and enables us through the Holy Spirit. We are forgiven people. Amen

Today’s Reading from the Old Testament

Ruth 3

Time to Reflect

At the beginning of Chapter 3, Naomi wishes to seek out some security for Ruth's future life, 'so that it may be well with you.' What might seeking security look like for us in this season? Where is our security?

Throughout the text, Ruth is consistently identified as 'other', an outsider, Ruth the Moabite. She is asked 'who are you?' by Boaz. In these challenging days this can be an insightful question for us to ponder – who am I? How do I define my identity? Do we frame our identity by where we come from, who our family are, our work, our roles in life, our faith? 'O Lord, you have searched me and known me', writes the Psalmist in Psalm 139. Perhaps we might reflect on the question: who am I in the eyes of our loving and faithful God?

Another feature of this multi-layered and nuanced text is the call to resist. Ruth faces discrimination and she is required to seek security as a widow. Perhaps, this text calls us as people of faith to stand boldly in courage and to continue to resist dominance, discrimination and the labelling of any as 'other'. How might we in this time of global pandemic continue to stand up for inclusion, justice and peace for all?

Take a time to sit quietly

A time of prayer

God of hope, embracing us, surprising us, loving us, be near.

Creative God, as we adapt to a new way of being; distracting and busying ourselves; may we also seek to be present to you and each other in this season of lockdown. Help us to know the presence of the risen one in our being and in our doing.

God of creation, as we bear witness to the springing up of Spring in the beauty of your creation, may we rejoice in cleaner air, and wonder at the blossoming of life amidst such

horror, longing for a new way of hope for our world.

Living God, we can feel claustrophobic, crowded or desperately lonely, our horizons of hope diminished. Lead us to restorative places, our still waters, remind us that we are not alone, call us to solidarity, to love our neighbours, to reach out. Draw us close by your hope-filled Spirit.

God of all comfort, when we are fearful, anxious or overwhelmed, may we hear you whisper our names lovingly, 'beloved child, do not be afraid.'

Tender God, when we are overwhelmed by grief and despair, you weep with us, embracing those who are sick, holding the dying when we cannot, present in a hand held, a smile, a word of comfort, love personified in doctor, nurse or care worker, embrace us in our grief. We pray for all those that are ill at this time, for those who care for them and for those who have lost loved ones...

God in the darkness, hold us when everything feels too much, when all we can do is get out of bed, when nothing gets done, when lockdown seems about competitive 'doing' and we haven't the energy to be productive, help us to listen to ourselves, to love ourselves as you love us, to remember that you do not measure our worth by our activity, you simply love and love beyond all measure, hold us in our struggles.

Resurrecting God, when we long for a return to how things used to be, open our eyes to the new thing that you are doing. By your Spirit labouring within us, may we discern new opportunities, yet also rest in the stillness. God of hope undiminished and new horizons, in this season you hold us through pain, anxiety and doubt, through loss and longing, through unexpected and unbridled joy, keep us enfolded in your loving embrace.

God of hope, embracing us, surprising us, loving us, be near. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

Hymn: Listen to 'O God you search me and you know me' (StF 728)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5q0QCl6ONNo>

O God, you search me and you know me.
All my thoughts lie open to your gaze.
When I walk or lie down you are before me:
ever the maker and keeper of my days.

You know my resting and my rising.
You discern my purpose from afar,
and with love everlasting you besiege me:
in every moment of life or death, you are.

Before a word is on my tongue, Lord,
you have known its meaning through and through.
You are with me beyond my understanding:
God of my present, my past and future, too.

Although your Spirit is upon me,
still I search for shelter from your light.
There is nowhere on earth I can escape you:
even the darkness is radiant in your sight.

For you created me and shaped me,
gave me life within my mother's womb.
For the wonder of who I am, I praise you:
safe in your hands, all creation is made new.

*Bernadette Farrell (b. 1957)
based on psalm 139*

A prayer of blessing

May the Lord bless you and keep you; the
Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be
gracious to you; the Lord lift up his
countenance upon you and give you peace.
(Numbers 6:24-26)

Original Materials by Rev Miriam Moul

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Local Churches please insert CCCLi No here

Ruth 3

Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, 'My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you. Now here is our kinsman Boaz, with whose young women you have been working. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing-floor. Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing-floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do.' She said to her, 'All that you tell me I will do.'

So she went down to the threshing-floor and did just as her mother-in-law had instructed her. When Boaz had eaten and drunk, and he was in a contented mood, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came quietly and uncovered his feet, and lay down. At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and there, lying at his feet, was a woman! He said, 'Who are you?' And she answered, 'I am Ruth, your servant; spread your cloak over your servant, for you are next-of-kin.' He said, 'May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter; this last instance of your loyalty is better than the first; you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, do not be afraid; I will do for you all that you ask, for all the assembly of my people know that you are a worthy woman. But now, though it is true that I am a near kinsman, there is another kinsman more closely related than I. Remain this night, and in the morning, if he will act as next-of-kin for you, good; let him do so. If he is not willing to act as next-of-kin for you, then, as the Lord lives, I will act as next-of-kin for you. Lie down until the morning.'

So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before one person could recognize another; for he said, 'It must not be known that the woman came to the threshing-floor.' Then he said, 'Bring the cloak you are wearing and hold it out.' So she held it, and he measured

out six measures of barley, and put it on her back; then he went into the city. She came to her mother-in-law, who said, 'How did things go with you, my daughter?' Then she told her all that the man had done for her, saying, 'He gave me these six measures of barley, for he said, "Do not go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed." She replied, 'Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest, but will settle the matter today.'