**7th June Trinity Sunday**

**Bible Month. Ruth 1 – The Story of Orpah**

**(prepared by Rev Greg Haynes)**

The word of the eternal Father created us.

The love of the gracious Son redeemed us.

The presence of the Hoy Spirit unites and empowers us.

Come worship the glorious Trinity, our God of power and love.

**STF 11 “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty”**

 1 Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!
 Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee:
 holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty,
 God in three Persons, blessèd Trinity!

 2 Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,
 casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
 cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,
 who wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.

 3 Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee,
 though the sinful human eye thy glory may not see,
 only thou art holy; there is none beside thee,
 perfect in power, in love, and purity.

 4 Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!
 All thy works shall praise thy name in earth and sky and sea;
 holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty,
 God in three Persons, blessèd Trinity!

Reginald Heber (1783–1826) *(alt.)*
Based on Revelation 4:8-11

God of the magnificent journey on which we find ourselves, be with us now as we cast our eye inwards and outwards in search of you, for surely we will find you in both of these places. Be with us as we think about the world of the people of the Bible and the world of our own lives, for we know that you abide in each. Be with us as we think about how you were the God of Ruth and her journey three millennia in the past and the God of our journey here and now. For we ask this in Jesus’ name. **Amen**

**Reading: Ruth 1:1-22**

**Talk:**

Have you read any good books lately? We should certainly have had plenty of time to read especially if you aren’t working or have been furloughed. A different story if you are working from home and having to home school your children at the same time.

What makes a good story? For me it’s a combination of the plot, the characterisation and the way the story relates to the human condition even if the setting is very different from ours either in time or place.

Bible month this year features the Old Testament book of Ruth. Most commentators regard this as one of the novellas or short stories to be found in the Old Testament, (others include the Joseph story, Jonah and Esther), written to explore questions of life and faith.

In a nutshell the story goes like this:

The peaceful story of Ruth is set in the violent times of the Book of Judges. Ruth, a Moabite woman, is married to an Israelite. When he dies, Ruth shows uncommon loyalty to her Israelite mother-in-law and deep devotion to the God of Israel. In the end, she finds a new husband among her former husband’s relatives, and through this marriage becomes the great-grandmother of David, Israel's greatest king.

The stories of the book of Judges show the disaster that came when God's people turned away from him. Ruth shows the blessing that came to a foreigner who turned to Israel's God, and so became part of his faithful people.

Of the central four characters in the book of Ruth three are women, strong, brave and principled women, all widows. Eleanor Roosevelt once said that “A women is like a tea bag – you can’t tell how strong she is until you put her in hot water”.

The least thought about of the central characters is Orpah, a Moabite, who features only in chapter one and was married to Ruth’s husbands brother. We might note that chapter one begins with famine and ends with family. The famine provoked the journey from Bethlehem into Moab where Naomi and her husband Elimelech and their sons found food presumably and happiness, but then Naomi was widowed and ten years later her sons died leaving Ruth and Orpah widows. Women, of course, in the culture of the day were utterly dependent upon male relatives to provide, so Naomi accompanied by Ruth and Orpah set off back to Naomi’s home and family. She begged her daughters-in-law to go back to their Moabite home and they both refused. Eventually after much heart break and tears Orpah returns. Ruth, of course, continued on to Judah saying in one of the most well-known verses in the Old Testament, “Wherever you go; wherever you live I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God” Ruth1:16

Orpah leaves the story in verse 14, staying longer than is often remembered. She is loving and obedient, yet that is often overlooked, indeed she is condemned by some because she abandons Naomi. Like Ruth, she is loyal; the only difference is that Orpah keeps faith with her mother’s house, rather than with that of her mother-in-law. Orpah refuses to give up her identity and traditions, and her commitment to her people should also be praised.

The difference between how Orpah and Ruth behaved reminds us that from time to time we face difficult decisions and moral uncertainties. There isn’t always an obvious right or a wrong way forward. If we choose one option, we may delight one person but disappoint another and vice versa. And in the choosing we may struggle, we may agonise and we may shed tears. Perhaps we should remember that God the Father in his grace guides, God the Son in his love informs and God the Holy Spirit gives us both strength and discernment.

As we reflect on the story of Orpah let us listen to this song **“Wherever you go, I will go”**

Wherever you go, I shall go

Wherever you live, so shall I live

Your people will be my people,

And your god will be my god, too.

Wherever you die, I shall die;

And there shall I be buried beside you

We will be together forever,

And our love will be the gift of our life

**Time of Prayer**

Lord of life: **bring your hope**

Loving God in these days of Coronavirus we begin our prayers conscious of those who mourn the loss of loved ones and whose lives have been forever changed.

Lord of life:**bring your hope**

We pray for all those frontline and key workers, those in education and social care and we ask your peace and provision that they may know your strength to sustain.

Lord of life: **bring your hope**

We pray for those who feel especially disrupted: those whose life events and celebrations have been cancelled or postponed and those whose future hopes and dreams feel distant and uncertain, for those who are the victims of domestic abuse and those who are forced to become refugees.

Lord of life: **bring your hope**

We pray for world leaders internationally and closer to home, for wisdom, insight and clarity and for a vision of community that goes beyond our national borders.

Lord of life: **bring your hope**

We pray for your church throughout the world as we gather in our different ways. Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us so we so that we and all your children may be free to worship you all our days.

Lord of life: **bring your hope**

Finally, we take a moment in quietness to recall the goodness of God and to inviting his grace to make us worthy of our calling.

Lord of life: **bring your hope**

Merciful Father: accept these our prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ

Amen.

**Lord’s Prayer**

**STF 397 “The Spirit lives to set us free”**

 1 The Spirit lives to set us free,
 walk, walk in the light;
 he binds us all in unity,
 walk, walk in the light.
 *Walk in the light, walk in the light,
 walk in the light, walk in the light of the Lord.*

 2 Jesus promised life to all,
 walk, walk in the light;
 the dead were wakened by his call,
 walk, walk in the light.

 3 He died in pain on Calvary,
 walk, walk in the light;
 to save the lost like you and me,
 walk, walk in the light.

 4 We know his death was not the end,
 walk, walk in the light;
 he gave his Spirit to be our friend,
 walk, walk in the light.

 5 By Jesus' love our wounds are healed,
 walk, walk in the light;
 the Father's kindness is revealed,
 walk, walk in the light.

 6 The Spirit lives in you and me,
 walk, walk in the light;
 his light will shine for all to see,
 walk, walk in the light.

Damian Lundy (1944–1996)

**Blessing**

May the grace of the Father be with you; may the love of the Son enfold you and may the peace of the Spirit comfort you today and always. **Amen**