

Sunday 8th May, 2022

Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church

Call to Worship

The Lord reigns. Let the earth rejoice. Let the many coasts and islands be glad!

Song – Heavenly Father, Beautiful Son

VERSE 1 Father, You loved me, sent Your Son to redeem Jesus, You washed me, by Your blood I am clean Spirit, You've opened these blinded eyes And brought me to Christ

CHORUS Heavenly Father, beautiful Son Spirit of light and truth Thank You for bringing sinners To come to You

VERSE 2 Father, You gave me to Jesus to keep And Jesus, You love me, as a shepherd, his sheep Spirit, You've given me faith in the Son And made our hearts one

VERSE 3 Father, You're waiting to hear my requests Jesus, Your loving open hand is outstretched Spirit, You're in me, You intercede And help in my need

Bible Reading – Ruth 1:1-18 (CSB)

1 During the time[a] of the judges, there was a famine in the land. A man left Bethlehem in Judah with his wife and two sons to stay in the territory of Moab for a while. 2 The man's name was Elimelech, and his wife's name was Naomi.[b] The names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They entered the fields of Moab and settled there. 3 Naomi's husband, Elimelech, died, and she was left with her two sons. 4 Her sons took Moabite women as their wives: one was named Orpah and the second was named Ruth. After they lived in Moab about ten years, 5 both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was left without her two children and without her husband.

Ruth's Loyalty to Naomi

6 She and her daughters-in-law set out to return from the territory of Moab, because she had heard in Moab that the Lord had paid attention to his people's need by providing them food. 7 She left the place where she had been living, accompanied by her two daughters-in-law, and traveled along the road leading back to the land of Judah.

8 Naomi said to them, "Each of you go back to your mother's home. May the Lord show kindness to you as you have shown to the dead and to me. 9 May the Lord grant each of you rest in the house of a new husband." She kissed them, and they wept loudly.

10 They said to her, "We insist on returning with you to your people."

11 But Naomi replied, "Return home, my daughters. Why do you want to go with me? Am I able to have any more sons who could become your husbands? 12 Return home, my daughters. Go on, for I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me to have a husband tonight and to bear sons, 13 would you be willing to wait for them to grow up? Would you restrain yourselves from remarrying?[c] No, my daughters, my life is much too bitter for you to share,[d] because the Lord's hand has turned against me." 14 Again they wept loudly, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to

her. 15 Naomi said, "Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. Follow your sister-in-law."

16 But Ruth replied:

Don't plead with me to abandon you

or to return and not follow you.

For wherever you go, I will go,

and wherever you live, I will live;

your people will be my people,

and your God will be my God.

17

Where you die, I will die,

and there I will be buried.

May the Lord punish me,

and do so severely,

if anything but death separates you and me.

18 When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped talking to her.

Announcements – Sunday 8th May 2022

HOPE Explored. HOPE Explored is a short presentation of what Christians believe around three topics that should interest all of us – Hope, Peace and Purpose. Most of the groups are having their last presentation this week. (although some will be on their second presentation). Please pray that God will stir up the souls of those who need to hear the good news about Jesus during these presentations

Focus for May – Hope. As we enter the last weeks of a Federal Election campaign, it seems that all the candidates are saying that having been through so much chaos and distress over the last three years, the only hope for our country is with their party. But that is not true. Our only hope is in the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. It is the confident affirmation that God is faithful, that He will complete what He has begun. It is also, therefore, that confident expectation which waits patiently and ardently for God's purposes to be fulfilled. This week it would be good to be still and meditate on this hope. Prayerfully and dependently identify what other things you are currently putting your hope in and spend real quality and quantity time looking to the Lord as the only basis for your hope.

Kids cooking classes: Sama as last week.

Christian Children's Books Needed. Same as last week.

Women of Truth (now called RENEW). Hope in the Darkness. Saturday 28th May 9am-12:30pm. Metford Community Baptist Church. \$25 pp. Speaker: Lily Strachan. For more details and to register (by Friday 20th May) hgm.org.au/renew. The Bible tells us that God is all loving and all-powerful but so often we struggle to believe these truths in light of persistent illness. Come and consider how we might live well in the midst of mental illness. Come and see where hope is found.

Mission Team. Each term we plan to have a ZOOM meeting with all those who are interested in the mission work of the Church. Our next meeting via ZOOM will be NEXT Sunday from 3:30pm. The ZOOM link will be in next Sunday's bulletin. All invited.

Song – All Glory be to Christ

Verse 1

Should nothing of our efforts stand
No legacy survive
Unless the Lord does raise the house
In vain its builders strive
To you who boast tomorrow's gain
Tell me what is your life
A mist that vanishes at dawn
All glory be to Christ!

Chorus

All glory be to Christ our King!
All glory be to Christ!
His rule and reign we'll ever sing
All glory be to Christ!

Verse 2

His will be done
His kingdom come
On earth as is above
Who is Himself our daily bread
Praise Him the Lord of love
Let living water satisfy
The thirsty without price
We'll take a cup of kindness yet
All glory be to Christ!

Verse 3

When on the day the great I Am
The faithful and the true
The Lamb who was for sinners slain
Is making all things new
Behold our God shall live with us
And be our steadfast light
And we shall ere his people be
All glory be to Christ!

Pastoral Prayer Points

Psalm 12:“ You, Lord, will guard us; you will protect us from this generation forever. The wicked prowl all around, and what is worthless is exalted by the human race.” Our great God thank you that in Christ you preserve us and protect us. WE pray for the idols of our nation to be exposed as idols, and for Christ our King to be exalted.

Pray for Appleby's: Pray for Gilbert's mother who has been diagnosed with cancer. Pray for peace during the midst of fear and anxiety caused by covid and travel restrictions. Pray for the spread of the gospel among Cambodian people's.

Prince of Peace, continue to guard our hearts and minds from the anxiety and fear that surrounds us.

Wonderful Counsellor, please bring wisdom and guidance to our governments as they make challenging decisions that impact our nation.

Mighty God, we ask that you would powerfully work to build your church, in our city, nation and across the world.

Pray for Mothers: thank God for the gift of mothers; who's gentleness, care and sacrificial love points us to our Lord Jesus. Pray that God would continue to equip them to do the most important job in the world - raising other humans. Pray children would respect and honour their mothers.

Bible Reading – Ruth 1:19-22 and John 6:60-69 (CSB)

19 The two of them traveled until they came to Bethlehem. When they entered Bethlehem, the whole town was excited about their arrival^[e] and the local women exclaimed, “Can this be Naomi?”

20 “Don’t call me Naomi. Call me Mara,”^[f] she answered, “for the Almighty has made me very bitter. **21** I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has opposed^[g] me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?”

22 So Naomi came back from the territory of Moab with her daughter-in-law Ruth the Moabitess. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

John 6:60-69

60 Therefore, when many of his disciples heard this, they said, “This teaching is hard. Who can accept^[m] it?”

61 Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, asked them, “Does this offend you? **62** Then what if you were to observe the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? **63** The Spirit is the one who gives life. The flesh doesn’t help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. **64** But there are some among you who don’t believe.” (For Jesus knew from the beginning those who did not^[n] believe and the one who would betray him.) **65** He said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted to him by the Father.”

66 From that moment^[o] many of his disciples turned back and no longer accompanied him. **67** So Jesus said to the Twelve, “You don’t want to go away too, do you?”
68 Simon Peter answered, “Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life. **69** We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”^[p]

Sermon by Jon Brown

Grace at the bottom of the barrel (Ruth 1)

We’re are about to begin a sermon series going through the book of Ruth. Four chapters over four Sundays. I’m excited. I’m excited to hear what God has to say to us through this book; a book that’s over three thousand years old!

By way of introduction - Did you notice when Ruth’s story took place? Check out verse 1, “...in the times of the Judges...” These were bad and ugly times. Times when there was no king in the land, and the people did what was right in their own eyes. And that’s a recipe for disaster! But Ruth is the good amidst that bad the ugly. The good news amidst the bad news. The beautiful amidst the ugly. The rose amongst the thorns. And we need to hear today just as much as they did back then!

Our days are full of bad news aren’t they? Our culture has been called, the culture of death. A culture that shuns the truth. A culture that celebrates the ugly and perverse. A culture that has lost the good, the true and the beautiful. We need to hear the good news according to Ruth - now more than ever! We need hear how the beauty of Ruth which foreshadows the beauty of Christ. We need to how this great story fits into the greater story of the gospel of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

So with that in mind, let’s pray.

You’re probably aware by now that I’m a country music fan. And just so know there’s good country music and there’s bad country music. I’m into the good stuff (yes there’s such a thing!) - mostly older classic country. There’s a great song by George Jones called Choices. Here’s how it starts:

I’ve had choices since the day that I was born
 There were voices, that told me right from wrong
 If I had listened, I wouldn’t be here today
 Living and dying, with the choices I’ve made.

So here's George who's at the end of his life. Full of regrets. Looking back on life forged by bad choices. It's a tragic song about a tragic life. But like all great country songs it's made up of **three chords and the truth**.

It's the truth because all of our lives are forged by the choices we make aren't they? Or the choices life makes for us! We're all on a journey through life. A road that's heading towards some destination. **Where are you going?**

The first chapter of Ruth is the story of choices made. And choices thrust upon people. And how the grace of God radically interrupts our lives and choices. Ruth 1 is a drama that hinges on a decision between two places: Moab and Bethlehem. And we're going to learn how it's a drama that all of us have a part in. The drama of our lives that hinge on a decision; ultimately between turning to Christ, or staying away from Christ.

Let's look at this chapter in three parts:

1. The Road to Nowhere (vv. 1-5)
2. The Way Home (vv. 6-18)
3. The Bitter and the Sweet (vv. 19-22)

1. The Road to Nowhere (vv. 1-5)

At the start we're introduced to a man and his family. The man's name is Elimelech - meaning "My God is King". Irony having a name like that when no one was living like that. And he's from **Bethlehem** - which means **the house of bread**. Which is also ironic - due to the fact there was no bread in the land! There's a famine in the land. Israel was coming under God's judgment. These were dark days. Times were tough. And so this man makes a decision. He makes the choice to travel to the country of Moab. And he takes his wife (Naomi), and two sons. And they up and leave in search for better bread.

Now this seems like a reasonable thing to do doesn't it? These were tough times in the promise land. On one level it seems like a brave thing to do. Elimelech is making a sacrifice to give his family a better life. Going to Moab is a good choice isn't? Well, not if we understand the significance of the places.

Moab is a bad place in the Bible. The Moabites were born out of trouble - Lot's daughters committed incest with their father. The Moabite god Chemosh was worshipped with child sacrifice (Num. 21:29). The Moabites seduced the men of Israel to sin against the Lord. Eglon King of Moab tormented the people of God for eighteen years (Judges 3:12). Contrast that with Bethlehem; Bethlehem is the land of promise, Moab is the land of compromise. Bethlehem is the place of life, Moab is the place of death. Bethlehem is the place of blessing, Moab is the place of curse.

The mention of Moab should cause us to shudder! Elimelech's choice to leave Bethlehem is bad! Really bad! The fella called, "My God is King" moves to a land where God isn't king! And there's a lesson for us here isn't there? Elimelech bore the label "My God is King" but made choices that reflected that God wasn't King! And in the same way, we might bear the label 'Christian', and yet Christ (our King) has no real impact on our life-defining decisions.

But let's keep going. So they take the road to Moab. And it turns out to be a road to nowhere. Check out verse 3, "Elimelech, Naomi's husband died, and she was left with her two sons." And they took Moabite wives (not good!). And then her two sons died! **They go to Moab seeking life, but only find death!** The grass is always greener in Moab. Like believers in the OT times, we can struggle in the same way. When we're going through hard times, we are tempted to doubt the goodness of God. We can be tempted to walk away from God. Maybe we complain about the job God has given us. Or the spouse, or the family, or the lack of family. Or the providence God has allotted to us. We can fantasise about greener fields somewhere else. We look on Facebook and Insta and see greener things. We see offers of better bread. But all Moab can offer is a veneer of happiness. It promises life but only brings death. **God gives life in one place.** In Old Testament times this was the promise land, which finds its fulfilment in Christ. All God's promises find their 'Yes and Amen in Jesus Christ.' Outside of Christ there is no life. Outside of Christ there is only emptiness, and ultimately death.

So here is Naomi who is reeling because of a bad choice. She went in search of life but only found death. She went in search of fullness but ended up empty. All she is left with is two Moabite daughters in laws. But things are about to take a turn. **God's grace is about to intervene. They're about to find grace at bottom of the barrel.**

2. The Way Home (vv. 6-18)

Check out verse 6, "Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab, how the Lord had visited his people, in giving them bread..." And so Naomi and her two daughters in law set out on the way home. And notice, on the way Naomi tells her daughters in law **to return** to their home; go back to Moab. Naomi knows she hasn't got anything to offer them. She's lost everything. But the two young women can still have a future if they go home. They can find husbands and settle down. They can go back to their people and culture. So Naomi kisses them and they weep together. But they don't want to go back do they?

They want to go with Naomi. And check out verse 11, "Turn again my daughters..." I've got nothing to offer you. If you go with me you lose out. It's a real predicament. We gotta put ourselves in their culture. And realise at this time, for a woman to be single was a poverty wish. It was a life of fear without protection. That's why Naomi is so adamant they go back. Because they have more of a chance of finding husbands **in their homeland.**

Remember they are Moabite women. The Israelites weren't permitted to marry them. It all hinges on this decision: **Should they stay or should they go?**

And finally there is a choice made. Check out verse 14, Orpah kisses her mother in law. And Ruth cleaves to her mother in law. Orpah goes. Ruth stays. And Naomi tries to persuade Ruth otherwise. "Go back with your sister-in law. Unto your people, and unto her gods, **return with her...**" But Ruth won't go back to her old land. She won't go back to her people and her culture. But notice again in verse 15, Moab is more than a culture - it's a religion - "return to your gods..." Ruth is doing something radical. Repenting. In choosing to go with Naomi, Ruth is foreshadowing all true repentance: turning from idols (1 Thess 1:9) to serve the living God. Notice in verse 16, Ruth says to Naomi, I won't take no for an answer! Wherever you go, I will go. You people will be my people, your God will be my God! Ruth, by pledging herself to Naomi - is pledging herself to Naomi's God. Ruth has made the most important decision anyone can ever make: turning away from death and turning towards life. A decision that we all gotta make!

Do you know Jesus confronted his followers with the same decision. In John 6, we're told that Jesus has just finished preaching that he is the Bread of Life. That God gives life in one place, and one place only - in Him. And that his words are words of life. And many walked away and left him. And Jesus says to his disciples - "Will you also go away?" And Simon Peter answers him - "Lord where else shall we go? You have the words of eternal life..." Peter chose life. Ruth chooses life. What about you? Have you turned from your old life, and turned to Christ? It doesn't really matter where you come from, but where you are going. Turn from sin and death. And turn to Jesus Christ.

But God's grace isn't only for outsiders like Ruth. But for those who have wandered away. Those of us who have rebelled against God. It doesn't matter how far you've wandered down the road to nowhere. The welcoming arms of God always are waiting. But more than waiting! In Christ, God hasn't left us to make the journey home alone! But has ran out to meet us. Like the Father of the prodigal. God comes running out to meet us! Jesus Christ left heaven to bring you blessing on earth!

But we can't miss the costliness of the choice either. Ruth left it all behind; her family, her culture, her religion, her idols. We must leave behind our old life! Our old ways. Sometimes choosing to follow Christ means our families won't talk to us. It might mean rejection, at school or at work. It might mean we give up certain pleasures that are sinful. Or good things that have become God things. There is a cost. Our Lord Jesus said, "Whoever would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.!" The way home, is the way of dying to self. It hurts! Jesus doesn't promise us an easy life! He doesn't sugar coat his words.

Let's make that our segue into the last part:

3. The Bitter and the Sweet (vv. 19-22)

In verse 19, Naomi and Ruth get a big home coming. But it's not so much a celebration as cause of shock. Look here comes Naomi...but where's her husband? Where's her sons? She's got nothing! Nothing except a Moabite daughter in law.

And not surprisingly, Naomi is feeling bitter! Check out verse 20, "Don't call me Naomi call me Mara. For the almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full but came back empty!" Naomi has lost everything, in an earthly sense. God doesn't promise us our sweetest life now. He doesn't promise us a life without suffering. Rather the opposite! How many faithful Christians do you know, who have chosen to follow Christ. But then they end up losing so much. Loved ones. Jobs. Their mental health. Their husband or wife walks out them! And when awful stuff happens our reflex action is to blame God. It might be a closed door in our career rather, or financial difficulty. Or shattered relationship. The result is our lives can become filled with bitterness. But in doing so we can miss the sweetness of God's grace! Naomi was so caught up in what she lost, that she couldn't see the greater treasure she had - Ruth. She couldn't see the hope amidst the hurt. But maybe calling herself Mara, caused Naomi to ponder that event that took place in the wilderness. Where in spite of the people grumbling, God turned the bitter into sweet. And demonstrated that he was "The Lord your healer..." (Ex. 15:26).

It's true the Lord only ever hurts us to heal us. He puts us through the fire, but only to purify us. It's true when the Lord wants to bring us back to Christ - he often needs to empty us. To deeply humble us. It feels severe. But it's a severe mercy! It hurts - but in the end Christ is our only hope. In the bitterness of our suffering we can still find sweetness in the gospel, can't we. The hope that things will one day get better. Behold I am making all things new! And notice our story begun with famine, but ends with harvest! And it's true in Christ there is always hope.

Spend some time reflecting on the God's word and the song below. Grace be with you.

Song – Cling to Christ

Father, I can come to You
And boast of deeds I've done
In my pride I strive to earn
The favor Christ has won
He alone pleads my acceptance
All my works aside

So I come with empty hands
And I cling to Christ
Father, I can go astray
And battle needless fears
Voices tell me I'm condemned
And that I can't draw near
But Your Spirit calls me homeward
With Your words of life
Jesus bore my every sin
So, I cling to Christ
It's more than I can do
To keep my hold on You
But all my hope and peace
Is that You cling to me
Father, all my earthly aims
In time will turn to dust
Let me learn that loss is gain
For those who know Your love
All the treasures of this world
Will never satisfy
You alone are endless joy
So, I cling to Christ

John 6 - “**68** Simon Peter answered, “Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life. **69** We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”^[D]