

LONGDEN and ANNSCROFT with PULVERBATCH-
Benefice of Great Hanwood, Longden and Annscroft
with Pulverbatch
May 2020

DAY 3 of your shiny e-mini magazine. The editors hope you are enjoying this venture as we try to adapt to the strange times we are living through. Please, if there is anything you would like to contribute—there are 4 more days left -please contact Sandra on 718930 or Pat on 718210



May Bible Study

In our series about women in the Bible we look at one of the few women to have a whole book to her name. She is one of the most well known, Ruth. The book, although only four chapters long, is a short narrative gem. It has been revered through generations as a source of teaching about family life and loyalty in Old Testament times. All the more surprising because Ruth wasn't a Jew and a number of Jewish (Deuteronomic) laws were broken in the narrative!

The canonical book of Ruth in the Old Testament reads like the script of a four Act play.

Act 1 “Famine and bereavement” (Chapter 1. 1-22)

This 'Act' tells of the famine in the time of the judges, when Israel lived in its tribes and clans. Elimelech's family leaves their home in Bethlehem and moves to Moab – a move ironically from Bethlehem, which means 'place of bread' to more fertile Moab. While there everything goes wrong for the family. Elimelech dies and leaves Naomi a widow. Their sons Mahlon and Chilion who have married Moabite women also die leaving the three women alone. Naomi, on hearing there is again food in Bethlehem, decides to return to her homeland. She tries to persuade her two daughters-in-law that it would be safer to remain with their families in Moab. One, Orpah, does this while Ruth clings to Naomi. The chapter end with Naomi and Ruth arriving back in Bethlehem. There is no celebration with Naomi calling her life bitter, she says she is 'empty' (possessing nothing), lamenting that God has done this to her.

Act 2 “Ruth meets Boaz” (Chapter 2. 1-23)

Boaz is introduced in verse 1 of the chapter as a relative of Naomi. It is harvest time and Ruth says she will go and glean the harvest fields, 'behind someone in whose sight I may find favour' (2.2). It is presented as accidental that Ruth stumbles on Boaz's field (2.3) although there is a hint this was more than happenchance. When Boaz arrives to greet his workers; Ruth is already gleaning. He asks his foreman about her (2.5-7). From his reply it is clear she has made a favourable impression as modest, hardworking and law-abiding (she asked permission before beginning to glean). Boaz warns Ruth to stay with his servant girls and instructs the young men to leave her alone. In this interchange we sense the vulnerability of a lonely foreign woman in a strange land. At the end of the day Ruth returns to Naomi to recount the day's events and Naomi reveals that Boaz is a relative, a 'kinsman-redeemer' (2.20) – 'nearest kin' or 'next-of-kin'. Ruth gleaned throughout the seven weeks of the barley harvest, but by the end nothing is resolved about their future (2.23).

Act 3 “Naomi seeks a ‘resting-place’ for Ruth” Chapter 3. 1-18

Act 3 sees Naomi taking decisive, proactive, steps to secure Ruth's future. It is a bold plan but one full of the possibility of rejection. It is that Ruth should lie down with Boaz when he went to sleep after his day's work (3.1-5). This is not a predominantly sexual act, but one asking him to take responsibility for her needs. As she makes plain (3.9) 'I am Ruth, your handmaid' (not servant as in some English translations) indicating her more elevated status and availability for marriage ... 'spread the corner of your garment over your handmaid, for you are next-of-kin'. Boaz responds with a blessing. He welcomes Ruth's act as an act of 'loyalty'. The kind of faithfulness which belongs in covenant relationships. Symbolically this is extended to Naomi, in that he gives Ruth six measures of barley so that she does not go back to her mother-in-law empty handed (3.17).

Act 4 “A redeemer” (Chapter 4. 1-22)

Act 4 takes place at the gate to Bethlehem where legal transactions took place. It gives on of the clearest insights into legal agreements made in that period in ancient Israel. In it Boaz 'redeems' both Ruth and a parcel of land of Naomi's, of which nothing has been said previously. Another kinsman is interested in the parcel of land, but not in taking responsibility for Ruth. So Boaz is able to 'redeem' both. Ruth and Boaz are married, thereby completing her 'homecoming' in Israel. She is linked to ancestresses of Israel like Rachel and Leah. Indeed she becomes one herself being an ancestress to David, Israel's greatest king. At the birth of Ruth and Boaz's son the women of Bethlehem provide the answer to Naomi's complaint in Chapter 1, 'Blessed be God, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin ... He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him (4.15)

On one level this is a story of the changing fortunes of one small family. But it is so much more than that. It is about the final triumph of hope over adversity. It is about the value of the extended family and kinship. It is about accepting difference and embracing the vulnerability of the 'stranger within your gates'. Not least it is about challenging the then perceived notion of the rigidity of Jewish law and practise. So much of the story is based on rejecting the narrowness of 'law'. The sons of Elimelech and Naomi should not (according to law) have married Moabite women. The law, in Deuteronomy 23.3-6 stated that Moabites should not enter the 'assembly' of Israel. In other words, they could not become full members of the worshipping people of God. Ruth did more than that, she entered what would become the royal line. The story of Ruth continues to challenge our understanding – surely Bethlehem was the ancestral of Mary, not Joseph!!

Do read the whole book as part of your 'discipline' during lock-down. It really is a good read. And it gives hope of redemption out of what might have seemed a hopeless situation.

Preb Graham Earney.

Books used in preparation for this study: The Book of Ruth: Exploring the Old Testament (vol 2 The Histories): Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible.

Subject: A POEM FOR THE LADIES

I'm normally a social girl
I love to meet my mates
But lately with the virus here
We can't go out the gates.
You see, we are the 'oldies' now
We need to stay inside
If they haven't seen us for a while
They'll think we've upped and died.

They'll never know the things we did
Before we got this old
There wasn't any Facebook
So not everything was told.
We may seem sweet old ladies
Who would never be uncouth
But we grew up in the 60s -
If you only knew the truth!

There was sex and drugs and rock 'n roll
The pill and miniskirts
We smoked, we drank, we partied
And were quite outrageous flirts.
Then we settled down, got married
And turned into someone's mum,
Somebody's wife, then nana,
Who on earth did we become?

We didn't mind the change of pace
Because our lives were full
But to bury us before we're dead
Is like a red rag to a bull!
So here you find me stuck inside
For 4 weeks, maybe more
I finally found myself again
Then I had to close the door!

It didn't really bother me
I'd while away the hour
I'd bake for all the family
But I've got no flaming flour!
Now Netflix is just wonderful
I like a gutsy thriller
I'm swooning over Idris
Or some random sexy killer.

At least I've got a stash of booze
For when I'm being idle
There's wine and whiskey, even gin
If I'm feeling suicidal!
So let's all drink to lockdown
To recovery and health

And hope this awful virus
Doesn't decimate our wealth.
We'll all get through the crisis
And be back to join our mates
Just hoping I'm not far too wide
To fit through the flaming gates!

Sent in by Thelma Costley

And finally—for today—a quiz and a prayer

Can you find the 31 books in the Bible hidden in the passage below?

Being tired of our usual holiday in Devon, my family decided to venture down to Cornwall earlier this year. We like coastal areas and beaches, so instead of Westward Ho seashore we stayed in a lovely campsite near Penzance where we soon encountered the friendly proprietor John Davis. There were stunning views of the Cornish Riviera and we enjoyed the local amenities which included tennis courts, crazy golf and swimming pool. We visited The 2 Kings Bar on the first evening, attracted by a sign saying a local sea-shanty troupe, Jonah and the Whales, would be performing. Being a fan of karaoke, my wife eagerly signed up for the singing competition on the third evening. I took the opportunity to chronicle the local paper, not being much impressed by the dire Jude the Obscure book I was reading, and was pleasantly surprised to hear my wife sing *By the Rivers of Babylon*, that song of songs by Boney M. So well did she sing this that Davis' competitive wife, a Hawaiian by the name of Kulu, keen to best her, immediately took to the stage and belted out *Delilah*. No other acts matched the quality of this singing, so the three judges were faced with a difficult job deciding who should win. They eventually awarded top marks to my wife, who won a bottle of wine to round off a most enjoyable evening.

The next day was sunny so we went to the beach. While the children went swimming, I built some huge sandcastles as normal, aching by the time I had dug a moat around them. In the evening, we drove past some palm trees on our way to get something to eat. I must say the fish and chips shop we finally found next to some alms houses was a revelation and I especially enjoyed the chips. Alms houses are normally found near a church, and this was no exception, with the local Parish church, St Matthews, a beautiful example of Victorian architecture. In my opinion, only the Romans were better builders than the Victorians.

The locals of course are very proud of their Cornish heritage, even to the extent of speaking Cornish. I however found it very difficult to understand: being very precise in my use of language, and pro- verbs, when they mentioned doing things directly, I didn't know what they meant. It used to be that actors at least spoke the Queen's English, but even when we saw a performance of *Cats* at Redruth there were problems. The recitation of *Macavity* was phenomenal, but Daniel Pengelly's portrayal of Old Deuteronomy was so riddled with Cornish dialect it made my head turn to jam. Esoteric I would describe it as, and it may have accounted for the early exodus from the theatre. I guess it is something in the genes.

Is there anything more typical of a seaside trip than an ice cream? We had our fair share, with Ezra's Ice Emporium our favourite. We also much enjoyed a trip to a bingo gala. Tians Xi, a Chinese entrepreneur who ran the bingo hall, was most welcoming, and he had the sense to use a local, Phil Emontague, to call out the numbers. We had great fun as we dabbed our cards, and the tension mounted as we went for a full house, so much so we could barely get our words out. 'It us!' exclaimed our son to our delight when he won. 'Josh u amazin' congratulated our daughter. Spoken almost like a true native of Cornwall.

A prayer for the church

May your love that never fails, strengthen the weak, encourage the fearful, calm the anxious,
heal the sick, through your church – your washed hands and feet on earth – distant but still present, virtual but still connected, apart but still helping.

God in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Amen.