

WORSHIP @ HORNSEA UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

SUNDAY 4TH OCTOBER

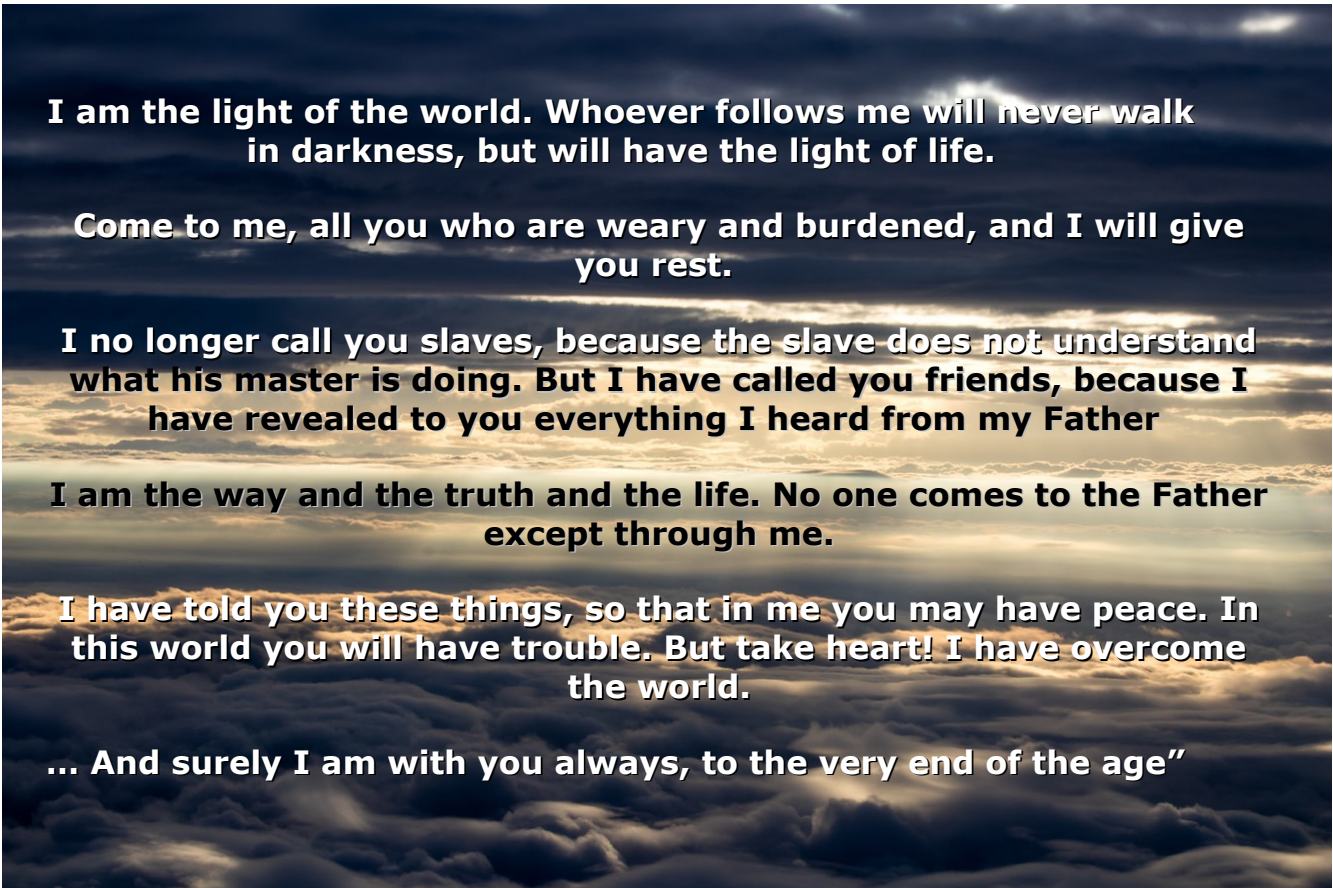
Today, some of our congregation will be following this service in church, others on Zoom and some from the printed copy on the website.

This is not how I imagined our first Sunday back together to worship would be.

In the early weeks back in April and May – I was planning for lots of singing and celebrations – more like a party – but today seems somewhat restrained. BUT is it really?

We may not be physically together in the same room but we are one in God's Spirit and wherever we are – in the kitchen, the study, or church – dressed in Sunday best or pajamas – let us still our hearts and minds and respond to your invitation of Jesus - **"Come to me"**

Take as long as you like to listen to this piece of music and reflect on some of the words Jesus has spoken ... <https://youtu.be/p2DwaYyif5E>



I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

I no longer call you slaves, because the slave does not understand what his master is doing. But I have called you friends, because I have revealed to you everything I heard from my Father

I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

... And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"

Continue this worship as you listen to Eileen and Chris playing our first hymn

Jesus stand among us <https://youtu.be/LjwjS9mOFeM>

Let the JOY of standing in the presence of Jesus bubble over as we sing:-

I will enter his Gates with thanksgiving (x2) <https://youtu.be/9kgQNT6MIIw>

Opening Prayers and Lords Prayer



God of all ages,
who from generation to generation
has heard the cries of your children
humbly seeking forgiveness,
and has welcomed sinners
back into your embrace,
hear the thoughts of our hearts,
examine our motives,
forgive us our faults,
of word and action.
We ask this through your Son,
who died that we might know
the true cost of forgiveness.

AMEN

We join with Christians around the world as we say our family prayer.

Our Father
Who art in heaven
Hallowed be thy name
Thy kingdom come
Thy will be done
On earth, as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our trespasses
As we forgive those who trespass against us
And lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil
For thine is the kingdom
The power and the glory
For ever and ever

Amen

The theme we are following for the next four weeks, is the book of Ruth and this morning we will be considering how we read this and any story in the Bible.

Thy hand, O God, has guided

<https://youtu.be/Vgw1jxU3DJk?t=2>

Reading – Ruth Chapter 1

*the wondrous tale is written,
full clear on every page;*

The wondrous word we are going to hear this morning is from the first chapter of the book of Ruth and I have asked (Jackie B) to read it for us from The Message Bible.

1-2 Once upon a time—it was back in the days when judges led Israel— there was a famine in the land. A man from Bethlehem in Judah left home to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The man’s name was Elimelech; his wife’s name was Naomi; his sons were named Mahlon and Kilion—all Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They all went to the country of Moab and settled there.

3-5 Elimelech died and Naomi was left, she and her two sons. The sons took Moabite wives; the name of the first was Orpah, the second Ruth. They lived there in Moab for the next ten years. But then the two brothers, Mahlon and Kilion, died. Now the woman was left without either her young men or her husband.

6-7 One day she got herself together, she and her two daughters-in-law, to leave the country of Moab and set out for home; she had heard that God had been pleased to visit his people and give them food. And so she started out from the place she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law with her, on the road back to the land of Judah.

8-9 After a short while on the road, Naomi told her two daughters-in-law, “Go back. Go home and live with your mothers. And may God treat you as graciously as you treated your deceased husbands and me. May God give each of you a new home and a new husband!” She kissed them and they cried openly.

10 They said, “No, we’re going on with you to your people.”

11-13 But Naomi was firm: “Go back, my dear daughters. Why would you come with me? Do you suppose I still have sons in my womb who can become your future husbands? Go back, dear daughters—on your way, please! I’m too old to get a husband. Why, even if I said, ‘There’s still hope!’ and this very night got a man and had sons, can you imagine being satisfied to wait until they were grown? Would you wait that long to get married again? No, dear daughters; this is a bitter pill for me to swallow—more bitter for me than for you. God has dealt me a hard blow.”

14 Again they cried openly. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye; but Ruth embraced her and held on.

15 Naomi said, “Look, your sister-in-law is going back home to live with her own people and gods; go with her.”

16-17 But Ruth said, “Don’t force me to leave you; don’t make me go home. Where you go, I go; and where you live, I’ll live. Your people are my people, your God is my god; where you die, I’ll die, and that’s where I’ll be buried, so help me God—not even death itself is going to come between us!”

18-19 When Naomi saw that Ruth had her heart set on going with her, she gave in. And so the two of them traveled on together to Bethlehem.

When they arrived in Bethlehem the whole town was soon buzzing: “Is this really our Naomi? And after all this time!”

20-21 But she said, “Don’t call me Naomi; call me Bitter. The Strong One has dealt me a bitter blow. I left here full of life, and God has brought me back with nothing

but the clothes on my back. Why would you call me Naomi? God certainly doesn't. The Strong One ruined me."

22 And so Naomi was back, and Ruth the foreigner with her, back from the country of Moab. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

I like this story – it could well be be a Fairy Tale, with some pretty grim and scary bits but with a - 'they all lived happily ever after ending'

But it is a book in the Bible, part of the Old Testament stories of the Hebrew people.

as Eugene Paterson writes in The Message -

'for these people, God is not an idea for philosophers to discuss or a force for priests to manipulate. God is not a part of creation that can be studied and observed and managed. God is person – a person to be worshiped or defied, believed or rejected, loved or hated, in time and place.

The Hebrews did not write fanciful, embellished stories, they did not entertain or explain – they wrote them to revealed the ways of God

Which reminds me of **Anamorphic art** – if you have not seen this before have a look at these two examples

https://youtu.be/IRo_dWU23Eo

<https://youtu.be/DciEFSAFoCo>

When we read the bible we may see a picture straight away but another time not be able to see anything that makes sense or something completely different. Like Anamorphic art we have to *move* through and around the story to get a complete picture.

I invite you to enter into the story of Ruth with me – and see what you can discover.

The story starts on a black note – there is a famine in the land. Things are going wrong, not because of God's judgment, but that's just the way things are in this land from time to time – lack of rain, or a locust epidemic – it does not say. But Elimelek cannot feed his family –

What would you do?

They decide to leave their land, and inheritance and go to Moab, on the other side of the River Jordan. It's not a good place for an Israelite to go - it is dangerous and humiliating.

It was from the mountains of Moab that Moses spoke to the Israelites before they crossed the River Jordan to enter the Promised Land – was Elimelek feeling failure for not providing for his family, for letting God down and leaving the gift he had been given?

- What was it like for Elimelek – what would he be thinking?
- In our world today – think of the people experiencing these things now?

We read that Elimelek dies, it does not say how or why – perhaps because the story is about the women and their journey. Women did not have much status in these times –

- What does this say that Ruth, a woman, a foreign women, without status is written about in a book of the Bible?
- In our world today – what does this say about women with no status in society?

Naomi would be feeling loss as well as uncertainty but she has two son's who could provide for the family.

But when they took Moabite wives it was perhaps not a time for rejoicing for Naomi - perceiving them to be marrying below their status and in danger of them worshipping foreign gods.

We then read that her two sons die.

At this point in the story – Naomi is without hope – she can see nothing but God's hand turned against her. What choice has she got? Blow after blow has devastate her life – she had lost her farm, her extended family, her homeland, her husband and her two sons and was alone in a foreign land with two foreign daughter-in-laws

Such was her grief that she could not see the hope that Orpah and Ruth were offering.

Is there such grief in our world today and who might be offering hope?

Naomi implores her daughter-in-laws to go back as we read in verse 4. “Go back, my dear daughters. Why would you come with me?”

What path would you have taken faced with such a choice?

I think it was faith that made Ruth stay by Naomi's side which she proclaims when she says.

16-17 “Don’t force me to leave you; don’t make me go home. Where you go, I go; and where you live, I’ll live. Your people are my people, your God is my god; where you die, I’ll die, and that’s where I’ll be buried, so help me GOD—not even death itself is going to come between us!”

Where did she get this faith? The only example she had was Naomi - but as we enter the story the character of Naomi - the evangelist- is not evident.

It is impossible to guess why she would make this commitment. Naomi is pushing her away. Naomi's people look down on Ruth's people. Naomi's God is the one Naomi has seen abandoning them – yet this God is the one Ruth appeals to in her oath of allegiance to Naomi.

This is all very confusing and, to me, shows little evidence of God at work in the story so far. Naomi once a devout Jew feels God has abandoned her and Ruth a Moabite is proclaiming allegiance to the God of Naomi – even under such hardship!

The chapter ends with the words:-

They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest

Remember the Anamorphic art? I think we have a lot of pieces here that do not form a complete picture – why not read this chapter again, from your version of the Bible, to see if you find any more pieces – you may be drawn to read on further

Where you may see God is working his purpose out

Hymn **God is working his purpose out** <https://youtu.be/Ms9Fu-O8ZHU>

Prayers of Intercession

We begin our prayers by committing to God the offerings we have made.

Generous God we give back to you a little of all you have given us and as we offer these gifts to you, we offer ourselves too.

We pray that all we bring may may be used for the good of your Church and the building of your Kingdom.

Amen.



In today's chapter from the book of Ruth we encounter people impacted by famine and displacement, forced to move because of misfortune.

We pray for all who are refugees or asylum seekers, perhaps because of war or persecution, or lack of food or home, or for other reasons.

We remember too the work of the Foodbank, the Pantry and other projects looking to help those who are struggling, here in Hornsea and beyond. Bless those who seek to bring relief and show *us* how we might bring help in small or large ways to the poor and the marginalised in our world.

**Hear the cry of our hearts
and let our cry come unto you O Lord**

In today's chapter from the book of Ruth we read of those touched by illness and bereavement.

We pray for all who mourn the loss of a loved one and remember before God our loved ones who have died.

We give thanks and pray for organisations who come alongside those who are bereaved such as Cruse, and those which more generally help those who feel isolated or lonely including the Telephone Support Network based here.

We pray too for medical and other professionals who work with those who are ill in body, mind or spirit.

Many of them are tired, stressed and anxious as they face the winter ahead with the challenges of Covid on top of everything else.

Surround those in need, and those who support them, O Lord, with your love and protection and reveal to us ways we can reach out with your care.

**Hear the cry of our hearts
and let our cry come unto you O Lord**

In today's chapter from the book of Ruth we encounter a family which seems to have known much love and closeness, but is now facing hardship, sadness and difficult decisions.

We give thanks for any good and happy times our families have brought us, and pray for any challenges or worries they are experiencing.

We pause for a moment to bring these to God.....

We pray too for this church family and give thanks for the many happy times that have been shared, including the joy some are able to share of being back in the church building.

But we recognise today may be difficult for others who would like to be in church today but can't be, or who perhaps struggle with the changes there have had to be in the ways we can worship together.

As we hold each other before God at this time of change and challenge we especially name before Him these from our church prayer book.....

**Hear the cry of our hearts
and let our cry come unto you O Lord**

At the end of book of Ruth we discover that King David was Ruth's great grandson and this prompts us to pray for our leaders.

We give thanks, and pray for the leaders of this church, with all the things that

have to be done, and decisions that have to be made at this time.

We pray too for our local Town Council and County Council. And for Graham Stuart our MP, our Queen and her Government.

Wider afield we pray for the leaders of the nations, naming this morning President Trump, as he is in hospital with Covid 19, and lifting to God the upcoming Presidential election.

O Lord our God we lift to you all those in authority in the Church, in this nation, and across our world.

Give to them the spirit of wisdom, compassion and justice, and cause them to seek the common good and look not to be served but to serve.

**Hear the cry of our hearts
and let our cry come unto you O Lord**

As we finish this time of intercession we lift ourselves to you O Lord.

Show us when you call us to stay where we are to serve you like Orpah and when you call us to move on literally or metaphorically like Ruth.

Show us your ways O Lord

and keep us travelling along with You

We bring these prayers to you O God in the name of Jesus, descendant of Ruth, and our Saviour and Lord.

Amen.

Just a few thought to take home with you

- **God continues to work his purpose out and we are part of the story**
- **What 'bits' (like anamorphic art) are we contributing to the picture?**
- **What will that picture be?**

Blessing

May God's Word be in your heart.

May God's Word be on your lips.

May God's Word be in your touch.

May God's Word direct your feet.

On this day and all your days to come

May God's Word be the life you live.