



Prayers & Readings for this week

- ▶ We continue our prayers for those in our fellowship who are presently receiving vital medical treatment of various kinds
- ▶ Pray for Katie and Scott, planning to get married in December
- ▶ We pray for those who serve in our community, including Doctors, Nurses, Paramedics & other NHS staff, Care Workers, Firefighters, Police, Social Services, and the wide array of other public servants
- ▶ Please pray that this will be a time of growth and strengthening for many churches

Monday	Reading Luke 17:20–37 Pray for Adriana, Philip, David, Joseph, Pete & Rebecca Richmond & family
Tuesday	Reading Luke 18:1–30 Pray for Mark, Rebecca, Charlie & Laney Rotheram
Wednesday	Reading Luke 18:31–19:10 Pray for Nick, Ada and Joshua Savu & family
Thursday	Reading Luke 19:11–40 Pray for Dean, Simona & Mia Stanfield
Friday	Reading Luke 19:41–20:18 Pray for Karl & Ingrid Stanfield & family
Saturday	Reading: Catch up Pray for Terry & Sheila Strong & family
Sunday 3 rd May	Reading Luke 20:19–47 Pray for Gert, Melissa and Jessica Schwartz & family

Here we are at the final Sunday of April. What a month it has been! The world didn't see this coming and we have found ourselves in uncharted territory. Recent news about extensions to '*lockdown*' and very long forecasts regarding '*social distancing*' has been worrying to lots of people. It seems that a virus we cannot see, and as yet do not fully understand, is holding the whole world to ransom, taking away what we have often taken for granted, namely: our freedom to work, trade, earn a living and our other precious democratic liberties – we are presently *severely* curtailed!

As Christians, we turn to the Lord, '*The Maker of heaven and earth*', who was not taken by surprise when this scourge descended upon the entire world. It is a timely reminder that we never do know what tomorrow may hold in store for us. And we can never boast about what we will do tomorrow. We have had two '*world*' wars! There was the *Spanish flu* one hundred years ago which wiped out an estimated 100 million people globally. Add to this the potential over the last fifty years of *nuclear war*, and we have often lived on the edge of tragedy. The standoff in the famous Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 between John F Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev is probably about as close as we have come!

This is why we continue to bring this global and daily threat to life and liberty before the Lord in prayer. I say this, not as a common cliché, but as a genuine response to the challenges of life. Others of us reading this page have severe challenges to their health and well-being – God is interested in *all* these areas of our lives. This is why we are to '*pray for one another*' (James 5: 16). It really does make a difference! On the back page of this *Update* are people we will be praying for this coming week.

Our church board met 'virtually' on Friday using Zoom; it was different but due to COVID-19, it is a safer way to attend to important aspects of how our church functions. I want, again, to thank everyone who has risen to the challenge to take part some way or other in our services, even if it is just sending a recorded greeting or best wishes and prayers for everyone.

Just so you know: Next Sunday, 3rd May, at the close of our morning Digital Service, we plan to take time to celebrate 'the breaking of bread'. If you wish to take part in this please do prepare *a little piece of Bread and a Cup of juice* as we celebrate communion together. **The Peace of the Lord be with you all...**

Message: *God's Peace in a Panicking World* (by Katie Sandford)

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Reading: Ruth Chapter 1

We all experience fear and panic at times in our lives, and this is a **good thing!** It's a very natural response to stressful events, or even danger - it keeps us safe! But recently, all of us have been in more stressful times. This is an abnormal situation that we may have never experienced before. But in it there's a story that comes alive to me now more than ever - where we see people in situations similar to ours: isolation, fear, hopeless despair, loss, familial splits. It's found in Ruth 1.

The conventional beginning of our reading introduces us, during a time of anarchy, to a man named Elimelech. You might think we would see Elimelech moving from Judah to Moab with his family during this time of famine. With bulk panic buying being displayed all over the news and Food Banks working harder than ever. It seems we can relate to this domestic scene almost immediately!

The death of Elimelech catches us off guard, and suddenly Naomi, his wife, becomes our main focus. Her children were left without a father and herself without a husband. Her sons married Orpah and Ruth. After they had lived there for ten years, her sons died. This is heavy stuff. We only get a minute to read these five verses, but we see ten years of her life, the good and bad. This story has a poignancy now, which it never had for me before - due to this pandemic.

Now we begin to see **movement**. After ten years of hardship for Naomi, we see the only direct intervention for human kind from God in this chapter. You might have expected that after over ten years of struggle for Naomi, that God would provide something in a miraculous, divine, BIG way... or at least some dialogue between God and Naomi. After all, aren't we're used to burning bushes - and Moses striking a rock with a staff for water to come out of it? But, no. She gets a whisper; small talk amongst people in Moab. *The Lord has provided food in Judah.*

So, Naomi, Orpah and Ruth pack up and start moving towards Judah. At some time along the way, Naomi reached **panic station!** Panic caused her to look at what she could provide for Ruth and Orpah. She felt she could not do it on her own, so she told her two daughters-in-law to turn back. Go home. She thanked them for their kindness and said the Lord will be with you and give you security - but he won't while you're with me.

In panic, Naomi did not accept their help and again told them to go home. She couldn't understand why they would want to stay with her, she could only comprehend what she was unable to provide... a son for them to marry. And then she says something that makes my heart ache, "If I thought there was hope for me." At the heart of it, her actions and words make plenty of sense if she has no hope. **A lack**

of hope gives us up to the elements, to the wind and rain, to every trouble that comes our way. We don't feel in control and we panic.

Orpah leaves, but Ruth clings to Naomi and says "Don't force me to leave you; don't make me go home. Where you go, I go..." (Ruth 1:16-17). It is in this act that we see God's provision which bring us comfort and peace. How often have we seen God using people to bless us? To feed us? Clothe us? Care for us? Ruth here *is* the hands of God and *is* God's provision to Naomi.

They begin towards Bethlehem, but Naomi still believes the Lord has dealt harshly with her, that she has returned empty because she does not have male relatives. Even though Ruth has given herself to Naomi in covenantal love and devotion.

In times of isolation, it might be easy to feel as though people aren't committed to us like that. What we do as a church is make ourselves accessible and useable by God for his purposes. We are showing up for you. If you're at the beginning of your ten years of struggle or reaching the end, I'm here to tell you that we're only at the end of the phone. You are loved, and you are cared for. Where you go, we will go. Your people are our people. And the same God that created me, and died and rose again in death-defying victory for me, did the same for you too. God provided someone even better than Ruth for you and me. **His name is Jesus Christ!** His life, death, and resurrection are a cling to creation that says "Where you go, I go; and where you live, I'll live. Your people are my people, I AM your God; where you die, there I'll be, so help me Father—not even death itself is going to come between us!"

This hope given to us by the sacrifice made by Christ Jesus offers us peace in these uncertain times. And we hope to the future, thankful for what Christ has done. Read aloud with us, the words from 1 Corinthians 15:50-58, and then sing or reflect over the words of a tremendous hymn:

When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!