

New Kilpatrick

Sermon

Ruth 1:1-22

22nd July 2018

Loving Spirit... the inspirer of words... the imagination behind ideas... the spinner of dreams... Spirit... spin again in us... a word... an idea... a dream... to set us free... to live as your people... beyond these walls...

Here's this summers top holiday tip... Plan your holiday to coincide with major sporting tournaments such as the world cup...

We were in France... as they progressed through the tournament... and so happened to choose the day they were playing in the quarter finals... to head back to the UK... Hardly a car on the roads...

And again when England were in the semi final... we so happened to drive from Oxford, home... Honestly it couldn't have been better...

Driving in France was generally okay... the part we were in was very French... I know that sounds daft... but we counter only three other British cars all the time we were there...

Excellent we thought... my daughter can show off her exceptional linguistic skills attained through Curriculum for Excellence's National 5 French course... We'll have no problem... She'll be able to converse... negotiate... explain...

We're still waiting... I wasn't allowed to sit my O'Grade French... but I still knew more french than she did... but given our legendary ability to point in any language... we got on just fine...

Language is a funny thing... Words hide things... reveal things... offer unexpected meanings from what you expect... as Mr Trump showed us a few times this week...

The story of Ruth... is one such case... because on the surface it is a simple story of two women... who have lost everything... and who come to rely on each other... and in doing so find new life...

But there is a depth in the story that gives us a word... that isn't written down in the book... but is defined by the whole story itself... of these two women...

And for us... for Sienna and Christy... it is one of the most significant words... we could have... to define and shape our community today... It is a word that gives our world hope... and indeed humanises our world again... in the midst our of fear of others... and our worry about future... trying to carve our way through deals and negotiations that are impossibly complicated...

The story of Ruth defines for us the word... *chessed*... a simple Hebrew word... that has no english equivalent but is closest to loving-kindness... It doesn't sound that significant... but it is how the two women respond to each other... it defines what they long and will for each other... Where you go, I will go... where you lodge, I will lodge... your people shall be my people... and your God, my God...

It is the word that changes you... that seeks another good before your own... that crosses borders and makes sure you never turn your back on another's need...

So powerful is this word... and so epitomised is it in this book... in middle english... they used the word "ruth"... to mean kindness... a word we don't use now... but we still use the opposite frequently enough... "ruthless"...

But the word 'kindness'... has become a dull word... a weak description of another... when we prefer using words like strong... and charismatic... The word 'kind'... is like the word 'nice'... it doesn't have the depth or value it once had...

So lets see if we can redefine it and do so by telling the story of Ruth once more... because you have two women... divided by ethnicity... Naomi is an Israelite... and Ruth a Moabite... Both these nations were long standing enemies...

Jonathan Sacks describes them simply as having nothing in common but mutual distrust... But Ruth the person... and kindness the verb... transcends such great differences... as two people... who should distrust each other... choose to journey together... Ruth chooses to take the road less travelled... for the sake of Naomi... re-identifying herself through Naomi's traditions... your people, my people... your God... my

God... The story illustrates that 'kindness'... or 'Ruth'... is the universal language of help to those in need...

Chessed... or kindness... is about providing shelter for the homeless... it is about offering food for the hungry... assistance to the poor... it is defined in visiting the sick... comforting mourners... go live towards another...

It is a word that comes into its own... when in Ruth's and Naomi's situation... everything else has been stripped from you... your power is gone... your security is shattered... your place in the world has been reduced... fear has removed everything you once were... In Ruth's day... there was nothing that protected to widows... There wasn't even family... there was no benefit system... when you are in that place... kindness... Ruth... humanises us again...

Ruth... who epitomises her name... is a gift for our world right now... because the story... tells us... that society... cannot be made by laws... or negotiations... or deals alone... real society is bad by kindness...

There is something big missing in how we are negotiating our future... We go into negotiations with NATO... Brexit... Russia... showing power by bad mouthing folk... or turning up late... But all of that... shows how much we actually fear the other...

We need something more... we need unforced... unlegislated kindness... that puts first the principle to reach out to the lonely and vulnerable... which... as a church is what we are built on... The entire kingdom is built on volunteers... who give of themselves to love their neighbour...

You'll never get that legislated into a trade deal... but we know... how rich that makes our community... our parish... our society... unforced... *chessed*... loving kindness...

And it is ours to let that grow more... As we continually re-shape our faith community here... and explore what it means to be church today... we know... it isn't membership... it isn't a set of rules... it isn't being good... or believing everything we are told... None of that is church... Instead church begins... when we refuse to walk away from another troubles...

This... this is one of those core values we have... and comes from that basic humanity God has given every human... religious or not... to care for another... kindness... compassion... *chessed*... to be Ruth...

This is how we humanise the world again... It brings redemption to the world... and it is defined there in the story of Ruth... by someone who has nothing... but her force of character... her refusal to turn away from another person... and where all she could give was herself... Naomi restored... Ruth restored... This is *chessed*... loving kindness... the kingdom...

So what language shall we use to explain the kingdom... to define the church... to speak of God?... Well beneath all the clamour of self interest... and the ultimate goal to only win arguments... or ratings or votes... and spinning words to turn them around to say what you want them to mean... despite what we heard... There is one word that stands alone... that can only be translated by an act of unlegislated and unforced kindness...

And it comes from a deeper truth in us all... that actually... the greatest gift... we can give anyone... is to be Ruth... is to not walk away... and that perhaps is why... this story of Ruth... is so important to us today... and the humanising of our world... that kindness can bring...

May that be the word Sienna and Christy are welcomed with today... and the act our parish and world is redeemed by... through us all...

References

Jonathan Sacks Lifting others we ourselves are lifted
<http://rabbisacks.org/lifting-others-we-ourselves-are-lifted/>

Kathryn Schifferdecker Commentary on Ruth
https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2123