

Abbey International Baptist Church, Reading
Worship Service 10:30AM 7th September 2025

Revd Dr Zoltan Biro's first service

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A story of love, redemption, and faithfulness

WELCOME

Change is one of the few certainties in life, yet few things unsettle us so deeply. Whether anticipated or thrust upon us, change often arrives uninvited, disrupting the comfort of what we know and challenging the plans we have made. Today, as we begin our series based on the book of Ruth, we will journey together through her story—a tale full of irritation, heartbreak, and, ultimately, hope. Ruth's story reminds us that while change can be painful and perplexing, it is also a pathway to transformation and renewal.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Journeying God, pitch your tent with us
so that we may not be deterred by hardship, strangeness, doubt.

Show us today the progress we must make
**toward a wealth not dependent on possessions,
toward a wisdom not based on books,
toward a strength not bolstered by might,
toward a god not confined to heaven.**

Help us to find ourselves as we walk with you and each other.

HYMN

Jesus is the name we honour;
Jesus is the name we praise.
Majestic name above all other names,
the highest Heaven and Earth proclaim
that Jesus is our God.

*We will glorify, we will lift him high,
we will give him honour and praise,
we will glorify, we will lift him high,
we will give him honour and praise.*

Jesus is the name we worship;
Jesus is the name we trust.
He is the King above all other kings,
let all creation stand and sing
that Jesus is our God.

We will glorify...

Jesus is the Father's splendour;
Jesus is the Father's joy.
He will return to reign in majesty,
and every eye at last will see
that Jesus is our God.

We will glorify...

PHILIP LAWSON JOHNSTON © COPYRIGHT 1991 KINGSWAY'S THANKYOU MUSIC

HYMN

Majesty, worship His Majesty.
Unto Jesus be all glory, honour and praise!
Majesty, Kingdom Authority,
Flow from His throne, unto His own
His anthem raise!
So exalt, lift up on high the Name of Jesus!
Magnify, come glorify, Christ Jesus the King.
Majesty, worship His Majesty;
Jesus who died, now glorified, King of all kings!

JACK W. HAYFORD © 1984, NEW SPRING PUBLISHING INC.

FAMILY TIME: Life is like a journey (A backpack with things for the journey)

*(*An offering will be taken during the following song, after which young people will leave for their groups)*

BIBLE READING 1: Ruth 1:1-22

1 In the days when the judges ruled,^{1a} there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. **2** The man's name was Elimelek, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

3 Now Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. **4** They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, **5** both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

6 When Naomi heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. **7** With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

8 Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. **9** May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband."

Then she kissed them goodbye, and they wept aloud **10** and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people."

¹¹ But Naomi said, “Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? ¹² Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— ¹³ would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD’s hand has turned against me!”

¹⁴ At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

¹⁵ “Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.”

¹⁶ But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. ¹⁷ Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.” ¹⁸ When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

¹⁹ So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, “Can this be Naomi?”

²⁰ “Don’t call me Naomi,[Ⓜ]” she told them. “Call me Mara,[Ⓜ] because the Almighty[Ⓜ] has made my life very bitter. ²¹ I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted[Ⓜ] me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.”

²² So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

HYMN

Lord, the light of Your love is shining,
In the midst of the darkness, shining,
Jesus, Light of the World, shine upon us,
Set us free by the truth You now bring us,
Shine on me, shine on me.

Shine, Jesus shine,
Fill this land with the Father’s glory,
Blaze, Spirit blaze,
Set our hearts on fire.
Flow, river flow,
Flood the nations with grace and mercy,
Send forth Your word,
Lord, and let there be light.

Lord, I come to Your awesome presence,
From the shadows into Your radiance,
By the blood I may enter Your brightness,
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness,
Shine on me, shine on me.

As we gaze on Your kingly brightness
So our faces display Your likeness,
Ever changing from glory to glory,
Mirrored here may our lives tell Your story,
Shine on me, shine on me.

SERMON

When Life Takes a Turn: *Dealing with Change in Life*

(Ruth 1:1–22)

Introduction

Good morning, everyone.

Today we begin a new series in the book of Ruth. It's only four chapters long, but this short story is full of deep truth. It speaks about God's providence, His faithfulness, and His grace in the middle of life's unexpected turns.

And let's be honest: life is full of unexpected turns, isn't it? Some of you are in the middle of one right now. Maybe your job situation changed overnight. Maybe your health has shifted. Maybe you lost someone you love. Or maybe you're standing at the edge of a big decision you didn't ask for.

The book of Ruth starts in that place. It begins in famine, loss, and sorrow. And yet, by the end, it will show us God's hand bringing hope, restoration, and even redemption.

Today we'll see three truths:

1. Change is rarely straightforward.
2. Change is often uncomfortable.
3. Change can bring new opportunities.

1. Change is rarely straightforward

The story opens with a famine in Bethlehem. The author of the book uses an ironic turn of phrase Bethlehem means "the house of bread", but there was had no bread in the house of bread.

Naomi and her family, like so many others throughout history, are forced to leave behind the familiar in search of survival. This isn't the change they planned or desired; it's a change imposed by circumstances beyond their control. Sometimes, as it was with Naomi and her family, the necessity for change comes when our resources run dry, when the land that once sustained us no longer yields what we need, when "no bread" remains in the "house of bread."

And that's true for us too, isn't it? We don't always get to choose when change comes. It comes with a phone call, with an announcement at work, with news from the doctor.

Often, when we face the challenge of change, we make well designed plans. We set goals, we make schedules, we think we know where life is going but reality has a way of tearing up our plans. There is an old saying "No plan survives first contact with the enemy."

In our story we read that in the land of Moab Elimelek dies. Naomi is left a widow in a foreign land. Her sons marry Moabite women, but after ten years they too die. Naomi is left with two daughters-in-law and no security. This certainly wasn't the plan.

And yet, Naomi decides to start moving again. She hears that the famine has lifted back in Bethlehem. So, she gets up to return.

2. Change is often uncomfortable

Change not only disrupts our plans; it shakes our sense of identity and belonging. Imagine Ruth and Orpah's decision: to stay in Moab, or to follow Naomi into a foreign land, leaving behind all they have ever known. It is not merely a change of address; it is the uprooting of their lives. Change is like uprooting a plant. You pull it out of the soil where it has grown, and you transplant it somewhere new. That's what Ruth and Orpah faced.

For many of us, change comes with sacrifice. Every transition, literal or figurative costs us something: friends, routines, comfort, sometimes even our sense of self. I've yet to experience a move, a transition, or a new chapter without leaving something behind, without incurring a little damage to what I thought would remain whole.

Not only is change unsettling, but it also involves grieving, letting go of what no longer serves us, parting with relationships, places, or stages of life that we cherished. We see Ruth, Orpah, and Naomi weeping as they contemplate their new realities. Even good change, like a child going off to university, or starting a new job comes with grief. Because with every new beginning, there's an ending too.

Change is rarely painless and that pain transforms us. When Naomi returned to Bethlehem, the women greeted her, saying, "Is this Naomi?" And she said, "Don't call me Naomi, which means 'sweet.' Call me Mara, which means 'bitter,' because the Almighty has made my life very bitter."

Naomi wasn't the same woman who left Bethlehem years earlier. Change reshaped her. And that's true for us too. But God often uses the dry and bitter seasons of our lives to improve our selves. Think of the butterfly, before beauty comes, it must enter the cocoon. Before it can fly, it must die to its old form.

3. Change can bring new opportunities

Here is the heart of Ruth's story. Naomi urged her daughters-in-law to return to their homes in Moab. Orpah kissed her and went back. But Ruth clung to Naomi. And she spoke these famous words: "Where you go, I will go, where you stay, I will stay, your people will be my people, and your God my God." In the midst of loss, Ruth chooses the unknown. Her journey is an act of courage, a willingness to give up comfort for the sake of something greater. She risks everything for faith in possibilities yet unseen. Jesus said, "If anyone leaves their mother and father and brothers behind in this world..." not because leaving is easy, but because where God leads, new blessings await. What is God calling you to let go of? What are you holding onto that might be keeping you from stepping into His plan?

Ruth not only let go, but she also embraced. She embraced a new people, a new culture, and most importantly, a new God. Embracing change means opening ourselves to learning, to dedication when the road gets tedious, and to perseverance when we are knocked down. Naomi was double-minded, caught between hope and bitterness, but Ruth is different, she does not want to hold on to two worlds, aching for what she left and at the same time refusing to invest in what lies ahead.

Two-mindedness leads to bitterness, because our focus stays locked on what we are missing, and it also leads to loneliness, because we hesitate to build new relationships.

Instead, Ruth steps forward wholeheartedly, perseveres through hardship, and in the process, discovers a new purpose, new relationships, and ultimately becomes the great-grandmother of King David.

Conclusion

The chapter ends in verse 22 with Naomi and Ruth arriving in Bethlehem "as the barley harvest was beginning." Don't miss that. The story that began with famine now points toward harvest. The story that began in emptiness now whispers of hope.

Change is rarely straightforward. Change is often uncomfortable. But change, in the hands of God, can bring incredible opportunities.

So, let me ask you today: where is life turning for you? What change are you facing? Is it forced upon you? Is it uncomfortable? Does it feel overwhelming?

Here's the good news: the same God who was faithful to Naomi and Ruth is faithful to you. He is working in your change, even when you cannot see it. He is planting seeds of hope in your season of loss.

So, when life takes a turn, take that first step of faith. Trust Him in the uncertainty. Hold onto Him in the grief. And embrace the new opportunities He places before you.

Because our God specialises in taking famine and turning it into harvest, in taking bitterness and turning it into sweetness, in taking sorrow and turning it into joy.

Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Lord you were at the beginning of all things,
It is through you that everything we see had its beginning.
So, for the beginning of all good things,
We thank you Lord.

Lord. You were there at our beginning.
You knew our names, even before we were born.
Every new step we take is already known to you.
For the beginning of all good things,
We thank you Lord.

Lord, you have watched us as we have grown.
From our first day until the end of our days
Our whole lives are held in your hands.
For the beginning of all good things,
We thank you Lord.

Lord, you are at the start of every journey
And we find you waiting at our destination.
You promise to walk with us and love us all our days.
For the beginning of all good things,
We thank you Lord.

Lord, we thank you for every new friend we make
And those whose love and care make each day special,
And for those who show us the way to follow Jesus.
For the beginning of all good things,
We thank you Lord.

Lord, we thank you for every new song
That points our thoughts and our praise to Jesus,
And we thank you for each time we can meet together for worship.
For the beginning of all good things,
We thank you Lord.

HYMN

1. Great is thy faithfulness, O God, my Father;
There is no shadow of turning with thee.
Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;
As thou hast been, thou forever wilt be.

*Great is thy faithfulness,
Great is thy faithfulness,
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed thy hand hast provided;
Great is thy faithfulness,
Lord unto me.*

2. Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above

Join with all nature in manifold witness
To thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love. [Refrain]

3. Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine and ten thousand beside. [Refrain]

THOMAS O. CHISHOLM (1923)

MEMBERSHIP

COMMUNION

Invitation

Come to the table of Jesus our Redeemer!
Jesus invites you here as part of the people of God.
Come to the table humbly,
not because you have earned a place here,
but because you need mercy and help.
Come because you love God, and want to love God more.
Come because Jesus first loved us, and gave himself for us.
Come because you want to be filled with the Holy Spirit.
Come because you want to experience the mystery of God's grace.

Institution

On the night he was handed over, Jesus had a meal with his friends.
He took a loaf of bread and after giving thanks to God,
he broke it and gave it to his disciples.
He said, "Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me."
After supper Jesus took the cup of wine;
and after giving thanks, gave it to them and said,
"Drink this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Whenever you drink it, remember me."

Let us pray: God our Creator,
thank you for the gift of your son Jesus Christ,
whose love pursues us our whole life long.
Thank you, Jesus, for giving your life to us in word and deed,
even unto death, even death on a cross.
Come Holy Spirit, feed us with your love
that we may be filled with power
to love God with all our hearts and souls and minds. Amen.

The Peace

God has made us one in Christ.
He has given the Spirit to live in our hearts.
So, The peace of the Lord be always with you.
and also with you.

Sharing the peace with each other

Serving the Bread and the Vine

It looks like bread, and it is bread. But God is incredibly imaginative.
There is a surprise in this bread, for within each crumb,
God has folded nothing less, than heaven.

And when we break it, and everyone has a piece, what we are doing is saying,
“Let’s share together the story of Jesus.”
It looks like a goblet of wine, and it is wine,
but God, being God, didn’t leave it there,
and has squeezed into each drop, a promise for the whole world.
And when we pass it among us, and everyone has a taste,
it sort of whispers to our souls, and sort of tangles with memories,
telling us: God loves us, God loves us, God loves us, completely.
So, lets break bread and listen to the story, and share wine and hear the promise...

[the bread and wine are served]

*Take and eat the bread as it comes as a reminder that all of us were saved through Jesus.
When it comes hold on to the cup and we will drink it together, because we are called to become the family
of God.*

Prayer of response:

We have come to the Lord’s table, we have eaten the bread of heaven.
God is the one who will transform us so that we can see with Jesus’ eyes,
hear with Jesus’ ears, speak with Jesus’ mouth;
so that we can be the body of Christ in the world,
proclaiming the good news of God's reign.
Come Lord Jesus! Amen.

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

THE PRAYER OF INTERCESSION: Mary

Father God, our guide and protector on the journey of life, a journey with so many possible turns and choices, we pray for every one of us as we continue on that journey. We pray for ourselves, for our families and friends, and in particular we pray for those whose life is far from easy.

We pray for those who have been forced to leave their home, their family and friends, their country, their settled life to seek a place of safety. Many whom we know personally have come to Reading, so we pray for all of these: those who are still here among us and those who have moved away to other parts of this country. May they continue to know your guidance and protection in their lives.

We bring before you those who are new to this country, and particularly those new to Reading and our fellowship here at Abbey. Today we begin a new stage in our journey together as Zoltan, along with Marta, starts ministry among us. We pray that this ministry may be blessed and produce great fruit for your Kingdom. We ask a particular blessing on those for whom the future is uncertain: those awaiting Home Office decisions, those in hospital and those whose health is giving concern, those awaiting further news about their future, and those in other parts of the world where there is conflict or other disasters ...

In the words of the hymn “*Change marches onward: may all change be blest!*” May we all be blessed in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen**

Hymn

Come, people of the Risen King
Who delight to bring Him praise
Come all and tune your hearts to sing
To the Morning Star of grace
From the shifting shadows of the earth
We will lift our eyes to Him
Where steady arms of mercy reach
To gather children in

Chorus: *Rejoice, Rejoice*
Let every tongue rejoice
One heart, one voice
O Church of Christ, rejoice

Come, those whose joy is morning sun
And those weeping through the night
Come, those who tell of battles won
And those struggling in the fight
For His perfect love will never change
And His mercies never cease
But follow us through all our days
With the certain hope of peace

Come, young and old from every land
Men and women of the faith
Come, those with full or empty hands
Find the riches of His grace
Over all the world, His people sing
Shore to shore we hear them call
The Truth that cries through every age
"Our God is all in all"

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BENEDICTION

When the path is hard, he will be with you.
When the road is unclear, he will be your guide.
When the journey is difficult, he will hold your hand.
When the destination seems far away, he will stay by your side.
When the way is dark, he will be your light.
When all seems lost he will give you victory.
When you feel alone, afraid and uncertain, he will hold you forever.
And when you go he will always go with you.
Amen.

THE GRACE

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore, Amen.



Events to highlight next week:

Wednesday 10th 10.30 Renew Wellbeing
 12.15 Bible Study

Thursday 11th 10.30 Toddlers
 7.30 Men's Bible Study

Friday 12th 5.00 Table Tennis Club
 7.00 Iranians Meal and Bible Study

Saturday 13th 10.00-2.00 Church open for Ride and Stride

Sunday 14 th	10.30 Worship Your God is my God - Ruth 1:1-22 (A historical introduction to the Book of Ruth)
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QR Code for Financial Offering:

