

Abbey International Baptist Church, Reading  
Worship Service

10:30AM 28 September 2025

Selina Chan leading & Rev. Dr. Zoltan Biro preaching

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Jean-François Millet: *The Gleaners* (Oil; 1857)

**THEME: Ruth 2:14-23 & Psalm 127**

Good morning, dear brothers and sisters. Last Sunday we've learnt from Ruth 2:1-13 that we are reminded to accept life challenges but need to initiate action in faith. We should also be humble, always work hard and God will reward us. We should be kind to others as well. God remembers what we've done and will honour us at the right time.

To continue learning from Ruth 2:14-23 today, we'll learn that God's providence is quiet yet powerful. Ruth's faithfulness and Boaz's kindness remind us that the other side of the coin is God's blessing -- God always provides in unexpected ways. Yet, Psalm 127 also alerts us that unless the Lord builds the house, our labour is in vain. We are called to trust God's care and grace, count on His blessings with a grateful heart, and build our lives in His steadfast love.

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

Come, all who are hungry for hope and thirsty for grace.

**We come to the One who satisfies and gives us rest.**

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build labour in vain.

**The Lord is our builder, our keeper, our refuge.**

God's mercy meets us in the fields of our daily lives,

Just as Ruth found kindness and warm welcome from Boaz.

**We rejoice in God's abundant providence and steadfast love!**

Let us worship the Lord together!

**HYMN MP799**

All I once held dear, built my life upon,  
all this world reveres and wars to own,  
all I once thought gain I have counted loss;  
spent and worthless now, compared to this.

*Knowing You Jesus, knowing you; there is no greater thing.  
You're my all, You're the best,  
You're my joy, my righteousness and I love You, Lord.*

Now my heart's desire is to know You more,  
to be found in You and known as Yours;  
to possess by faith what I could not earn,  
all-surpassing gift of righteousness.

O to know the power of Your risen life  
and to know You in Your sufferings;  
to become like You in Your death, my Lord,  
so with You to live and never die.

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**FAMILY TIME:**

*(\*An offering will be taken during the following song, after which teenagers and children will leave for their groups)*

**HYMN MP 151**

For I'm Building A People Of Power  
And I'm Making A People Of Praise  
That Will Move Through This Land By My Spirit  
And Will Glorify My Precious Name

Build Your Church, Lord Make Us Strong, Lord  
Join Our Hearts, Lord, Through Your Son  
Make Us One, Lord In Your Body  
In the Kingdom of Your Son

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**PRAYERS OF PRAISE AND CONFESSION**

Almighty Lord, Creator of Heaven and Earth,  
We lift our voices in praise to You.  
You are the One who provides food for the hungry,  
rest for the weary, and hope for the despaired.  
You weave together our lives with Your goodness,  
And guide us with unseen hands.  
O Lord, You are our joy, our refuge and our strength.  
Thank You Lord, Amen.

Merciful Lord, we confess that we often believe in our own wisdom,

rather than in your promises.  
We work and toil as if everything depends on us,  
Forgetting that You are the builder and creator of all beings.  
We admit that we do not always show kindness or trust.  
Too often we overlook the needs of others,  
hold back generosity and fail to live with faithfulness.  
Forgive us, Lord, renew our hearts. Help us to trust that  
when we rest in You, our work is blessed,  
and when we walk with You, our steps are guided.  
Amen.

**Hymn MP 673:**

There is a Redeemer  
Jesus, God's own Son,  
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,  
Holy One.

Jesus my Redeemer,  
Name above all names,  
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,  
O for sinners slain.

*Thank You, O my Father,  
For giving us Your Son,  
And leaving Your Spirit—  
Till the work on earth is done.*

When I stand in glory  
I will see His face,  
And there I'll serve my King forever  
In that holy place.

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**BIBLE READING 1: Ruth 2: 10-23**

**BIBLE READING 2: Psalm 127:1-2**

**HYMN BPW357**

Seek ye first the kingdom of God  
And His righteousness,  
And all these things shall be added unto you,  
Allelu-, alleluia.

*Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, allelu-, alleluia!*

Man shall not live by bread alone,  
But by every word,  
That proceeds from the mouth of God,  
Allelu-, alleluia.

Ask and it shall be given unto you,  
Seek and ye shall find.  
Knock and it shall be opened unto you,  
Allelu-, alleluia.

If the Son shall set you free,  
Ye shall be free indeed.  
Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free,  
Hallelu, hallelujah!

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart,  
He shall direct thy path,  
In all thy ways acknowledge Him,  
Allelu-, alleluia.

Praise to the Father, praise to the Son,  
Praise to the Spirit, too,  
And to the Godhead, three in one;  
Allelu-, alleluia.

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## **SERMON**

Finding favour in the field

Ruth 2:10-23

Let me start where Pauline left it last week. On the fields of Boaz where Ruth was gleaning.

There was a point in the story when Boaz turns up and notices Ruth and allows her to continue to glean on his fields. Ruth according to ancient costumes falls to the ground (literally “face to the ground”) and thanks Boaz, not directly for allowing her to glean, but “taking notice of me, a foreigner”. Here the Hebrew text has a word play, because the word for foreigner is “those who we don’t recognise” ... So, a more literal translation would be “how come you recognise me, when I am one who is not recognised.”

Which brings up an important point about how we treat people who are not like us, culturally, racially, ethnically, religiously. Often humans, not only distance themselves from people different from them, but they sideline and marginalise them.

This behaviour of exclusion nowadays is called *Othering*.

### **1. Othering**

Othering can be expressed through language that undervalues and stereotypes anyone who is different because of their characteristics. Instead of celebrating a person’s diversity and individuality, it leads to premature judgments. It divides society into “us” and “them”. In extreme cases it allows the majority to dehumanise the minority. Let me give you some examples:

- Reluctance to interact with people outside of one’s own social group
- Feeling threatened by people from outside one’s own social group

- Attributing negative qualities to individuals from a different social group
- Undervaluing, underestimating or ridiculing people who do not belong to one's own social group
- Preventing individuals who are seen as outsiders from accessing the same rights, benefits or opportunities as everyone else.

Attributes that can trigger othering are: Age, Race and ethnicity, class and socioeconomic status, nationality, religion, disability, or language

The writer of Ruth is absolutely aware of this behaviour and captures it well throughout the book, but especially in chapter 2 (v.2, v6, v21). But by the end of the book she is not Ruth the Moabite only Ruth the wife of Boaz.

So how can we overcome Othering?

Ruth has two practical advice both to people who are exercising and also who are experiencing Othering:

Let's start by exercising a bit of self-reflection. It may shock you what I am going to say to you, but we are all offenders when it comes to marginalising people. Maybe not at the same extent, but we all practice Othering:

Let me give you 2 examples:

Example 1: Picture of Hell's Angels Motorbike Club

Example 2: Picture of Mother Theresa.

## **2. Noticing Others and Practicing Kindness**

So, how can we overcome this instinctive behaviour in us? How did Boaz overcome his othering, how did the Bethlehemites their othering?

To answer this question, the book of Ruth draws our attention to a word, which is repeated over and over again: to know, to recognise and to take notice of someone.

Boaz is the known member of Elimelek's Clan, while Ruth is the foreigner... the one who is not known, who comes to the people who she "did not know before".

Boaz who is known to Naomi notices the one who is unknown and acknowledges her right to his protection.

At the same time the writer also repeats the word for "eyes". Ruth uses several times the phrase of "finding favour in the eyes of..." (v.2, v10, v.13). While Boaz uses when he tells Ruth to keep her eyes on the field that is being reaped.

What this part of the story tells us is that overcoming Othering starts, by taking notice of others. Noticing, others not as different from us, but as individuals loved by God, gifted by God. It starts, with listening to each other's stories.

However, overcoming this behaviour doesn't stop with recognising the other person. It requires action. That action in the book of Ruth is kindness. Already in the first chapter this phrase is used multiple times. When Naomi blesses Ruth and Orpah she asks that God may treat them with the same level of kindness as they treated Naomi.

Kindness is the Old Testament equivalent of grace. It is not required by the law, there is no social expectation to do it. In today's reading Boaz goes well beyond the requirements of the law. He invites Ruth to lunch with the working party. He allows her to drink from their water jars. He tells his servants to drop some of the stalks so Ruth can get more grain for herself and Naomi.

If we want to overcome our bad behaviour of marginalising others, we have to start with by connecting with others and practicing kindness.

### 3. Holding on and being gentle

But what about if we are at the receiving end of othering, if we are the marginalised, if we are the ones who are not recognised? Can we do anything to change the attitudes of the majority?

First of all, I would like to remind you that when we started the Book of Ruth we highlighted that in order to settle well in a new place we must let things go and at the same time we have to embrace the new settings.

What I didn't mention at the time is that "holding on", "embracing" or more accurately "clinging on" and its opposite "leaving behind" is a major contrast in the book. In the first chapter Ruth his mother and father behind and "clings on" to Naomi. In today's reading Boaz tells Ruth to cling on to his workers and later Naomi tells her the same. At the same time Boaz tells his workers to leave extra stalks behind for Ruth.

Gleaning is not easy, bending all day in the heat to get a few stalks feels tiring, but sometimes we just have to hold on and persevere through the dry seasons of our lives.

But there is a second thing, Ruth does and it doesn't go unnoticed, it is Ruth's kindness towards Naomi. Boaz's first sentence reveals this: "I heard of your kindness towards your mother-in-law".

You see kindness works both ways. Being kind can break through stigmas and the behaviour of Othering.

Let me tell you a story about this, that happened with us about 18 years ago. We were on a Baptist Assembly in Bournemouth and completely lost our ways in the town. This was before Google maps was available. I was a student at the time and we lived on very little income. But we had no choice, we had to get into a taxi. As we explained where we want to go, we noticed that the driver was a bearded guy with a Pakistani accent. I was sitting in the front and I also noticed that he did not start his meter when he took off. I was worried... how much is he going to charge us. Marta was worried... is he going to kidnap us. But in a few minutes he stopped in front of the conference centre. When I asked what we owe him, his answer shocked me "just say a prayer for me on your conference".

I believe that on a week when all Muslims were accused of being terrorists this story reminds me that kindness can overwrite discrimination. And what is interesting that it works both ways.

Ultimately, the story of Ruth teaches us that **kindness is a transformative force: it bridges divides, softens hardened views, and can heal wounds caused by misunderstanding and prejudice.**

May we choose kindness in our daily encounters, believing that even the simplest act of grace has the power to change hearts and open doors, for both us and others.

## HYMN

I love You, Lord  
Oh, Your mercy never failed me  
And all my days, I've been held in Your hands  
From the moment that I wake up  
Until I lay my head  
Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God

All my life You have been faithful  
All my life You have been so, so good  
With every breath that I am able  
Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God

I love Your voice  
You have led me through the fire  
In darkest night You are close like no other  
I've known You as a Father  
I've known You as a Friend  
Oh, I have lived in the goodness of God, oh-oh-oh

Bridge:       Your goodness is running after, it's running after me  
                  Your goodness is running after, it's running after me  
                  With my life laid down, I'm surrendered now  
                  I give You everything  
                  'Cause Your goodness is running after, it's running after me  
                  Your goodness is running after, it's running after me  
                  Your goodness is running after, it's running after me

All my life You have been faithful  
All my life You have been so, so good  
With every breath that I am able  
Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God

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## PRAYER OF INTERCESSION: Selina and Lam

Dear Father God,

Thank You for the story of Ruth, where faithfulness and kindness reflect Your great love. You are the One who builds the house. Unless You watch over our town, our country, and our world, our efforts are in vain. Grant us safety and peace, we pray, as crime troubles our communities and wars; even worse, conflicts rage in Europe, the Middle East, America, and Asia. Though we do not know what lies ahead, we trust in You, our sure foundation.

**God, You are our strength and our hope. Through Christ, our Redeemer, we pray. Amen.**

You are the One who gives peace and rest to those You love. Unless You provide, our rising early and working late is in vain. Lord, grant abundance where there is poverty. Many suffer from

hunger, poor health, and rising food prices. Many families struggle to provide despite their hard work. Show Your mercy and sustain them.

**God, You are our provider and our shelter. Through Christ, our Redeemer, we pray. Amen.**

You are the One who heals the sick and raises the dead. Lord, give resilience and proper care to those in need. Among us, and in many places, people face aging, illness, and hardship. Strengthen the sick and comfort their families when despair weighs heavily.

**God, You are our healer and our comforter. Through Christ, our Redeemer, we pray. Amen.**

You are the One who created heaven and earth. Unless You safeguard creation, our efforts are too small. Lord, have mercy in the face of climate change and natural disasters. Protect those devastated by wildfires, floods, earthquakes, droughts and famine. Help us to live wisely as stewards of Your creation.

**God, You are our creator and Protector. Through Christ, our Redeemer, we pray. Amen.**

**HYMN MP 857:**

I, the Lord of sea and sky,  
I have heard My people cry;  
All who dwell in dark and sin  
My hand will save.  
I, who made the stars of night,  
I will make their darkness bright.  
Who will bear My light to them?  
Whom shall I send?

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?  
I have heard You calling in the night.  
I will go, Lord, if You lead me;  
I will hold Your people in my heart.*

I, the Lord of snow and rain,  
I have borne my people's pain;  
I have wept for love of them –  
They turn away.  
I will break their hearts of stone,  
Give them hearts for love alone;  
I will speak My word to them.  
Whom shall I send?

I, the Lord of wind and flame,  
I will tend the poor and lame,  
I will set a feast for them –  
My hand will save.  
Finest bread I will provide  
Till their hearts are satisfied;  
I will give My life to them.  
Whom shall I send?

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## **BENEDICTION**

Go now in peace, beloved of God.

May the Lord, who watched over Ruth in the fields and blessed her with abundance,

