



KAURIHOHORE / KAMO CO-OPERATING PARISH

kaurichurch.methodist.org.nz

kaurichurch@gmail.com

(09) 946 0813

59 Apotu Road, Kaurihohore



Sunday 3 August 2025 – Pentecost 8

The service today has been prepared by
Kimberley Nielsen, one of our Lay Preachers

Welcome to our service this morning.

In working together on our shared mission, we commit to seven core values:

Togetherness, Humility, Curiosity, Love, Inclusiveness, Justice, Sustainability.

Sustainability: we care for and strive to restore the integrity of the Earth and all of creation.

Mission Statement: Sharing God's love, creating hope, working for justice.

Community time during the service is a good opportunity to ask for prayers for yourself or others.

**After the service you are invited to share in morning tea,
either in the kitchen or on the deck.**

If you, or someone you know, would appreciate a visit from one of our **Pastoral Network Team**, please speak to the service leader.

*You are invited to stand if you are able,
for the hymns and the offering prayer.*

*You are also invited to share in reading aloud the responses in **Bold**.*

Welcome

Kia ora, and welcome to our service this morning. My name is Kimberley, and I am one of the lay preachers here at Kaurihohore.

Today marks the beginning of a new teaching series for us as a church. Every Sunday during the month of August, we will be looking at the book of Ruth. We begin today with chapter 1; next week is Eleanor with chapter 2; then Jane with chapter 3; Rosalie with chapter 4; and, because this is a 5 Sunday month, Richard will be rounding out the series with a sharing service giving us a chance to reflect on what's been discussed during the series. As a teaching team we are looking forward to going on this journey together, as we rediscover the story of Ruth and Naomi and what this means for us today.

Call to Worship

Life is a journey on many different roads

But God is always with us.

Sometimes we lift our faces to the sun

And God is with us.

But then there is the hard journey

Through pathways of pain

And fears in dark places.

But God is with us,

Nothing can separate us

from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Opening Prayer

Loving God, you stay with us when the hard times are our times.

When we lose a loved one,

you are present with gentleness and compassion.

When we move to a new place,
you offer us trust and confidence.

When we are called to learn a different way of living,
you are with us as we practice new skills.

As we deepen our faith and give thanks in worship,
you are here. Amen.

Adapted from David Sparks, Responsive Prayers, year B

Hymn – [Great Is Your Faithfulness](#) (HFTC 260)

Prayer of Confession

Heavenly Teacher, we do not always pray as we ought.

Help us to speak the truth and to listen for your forgiveness:

When we pray, "Our Father in heaven," but forget to embrace all people as your children...

When we say "Your kingdom come" without working for your kingdom on earth...

When we ask for our daily bread, but do not recognize it as your gift...

When we request forgiveness for ourselves, but fail to pardon others...

When we plead not to be led into times of trial, but walk willingly into temptation...

When we honour you with our lips, but fail miserably with our lives...

O God, forgive us. Create spaces in our prayer, that we might hear and live out your words back to us, words of love and justice, grace and forgiveness.

Amen.

Video – The Bible Project: Book of Ruth

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0h1eoBeR4Jk>

Reading – Ruth, Chapter 1 – The Message

Hymn – When I Can't Face Another Day

(David Bjorlin; Hope will not Fail;

Tune: [All People That on Earth Do Dwell](#))

When I can't face another day
Or find the words or faith to pray,
Though everything feels off and wrong,
I lift my murmured morning song.

My night was filled with fear, not rest,
Each fear replayed, each weakness stressed,
So here I stand bereft of hope
And plead for grace and strength to cope.

Release me from the grip of grief,
Revive my cold and dead belief,
Relieve me of this grim despair,
Recall your love and prove you care.

For in this pit of loss and dread
The waters rise above my head,
As help and trust drift from the grasp
And every breath becomes a gasp.

Yet, here I am defying death
With ev'ry heartbeat, ev'ry breath
Be with me when the path is rough,
And may your presence be enough.

Sermon

Sometimes when we read the Bible, the stories can be a little.... Hard to relate to. For instance:

- Has anyone here ever seen a bush that appears to be on fire, only for you to get closer and realise it's not actually burning, and then God speaks to you from that bush?
- Has the donkey you're riding ever stopped, refused to go further, and then spoken to you?
- Have you ever been hanging out with your friends, and flames appeared above everyone's heads, and then you all start speaking different languages that you'd never spoken before?
- Or, have you ever been in jail, and then there's a big earthquake, and the doors fell off so you could escape?

See what I mean? Bible stories can be hard to relate to, and that's just at a surface level, never mind the 2000+ years of time and culture difference. Our story this morning, however, the one about Naomi and Ruth, is very relatable but often in the worst ways.

We don't have to look very far, to find people who have experienced, or are experiencing, the tragedies that these women faced. There is a good chance that either you yourself, or someone you know, can relate to at least 1 of the following:

- Moving from your homeland to another country – granted, this is not always a sad event, but it can come with some complicated feelings.
- Your spouse dying
- Your child dying
- Having trouble falling pregnant

- Being in a situation that leads you to believe, “God has dealt me a hard blow” or be tempted to say, “the Strong One ruined me”.

Last Sunday, we heard from Kelly at Family Works Northern about people in our community who are struggling to feed their families. In countries such as Haiti, Sudan, Burkina Faso and Mali people are experiencing famine, and in Gaza there is the deliberate starvation of hundreds of thousands of people.

This story is relatable.

Naomi and Elimelech’s decision to go to Moab is an interesting one. Moab had a long history of being looked down upon by Israelites. For instance, Deuteronomy 23:3-4, 6 reads, “No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD, because they did not meet you with food and water on your journey out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam ... to curse you ... You shall never promote their welfare or their prosperity as long as you live.”

But I guess when you’re starving, you go where the food is. The Israelite community in Moab can’t have been very big, because when it was time for Naomi’s sons to marry, they married Moabite women. “Marry” is a misleading word to use here because biblical scholar, Wil Gafney, says the word used means “to take”. This suggests that Ruth and Orpah were likely abducted and forced into marriage with these men, not uncommon for the time – remember of our concept of marriage, and modern ideas around consent didn’t exist at this time – but it’s important to recognise the trauma Naomi’s daughters-in-law experienced. This also adds another level of relatability to our story for those who have experienced sexual assault.

So, we have a story that begins with a group of grieving, and repeatedly traumatised women. Women who live in a society where, without husbands and sons, they have no value, no security, and no hope for the future.

In her fantastic book, *The Gospel of Ruth*, Carolyn Custis James says: “In 5 short verses, death wipes the men off the scene, leaving 3 grieving widows behind. In a male centered culture that ascribed value to women based on their relationships to men, these husbandless, sonless woman hold no interest to anyone. In many minds, especially in the minds of the three women themselves, the story is over. Nothing is left to tell. Yet ironically, this is where the narrative heats up as the biblical spotlight settles on Naomi and an all-female cast. Now the real story begins.”

She adds, “By spotlighting Naomi’s ordeal, the narrator gives us permission to voice the thoughts and questions we are fighting so desperately to suppress. And in some mysterious way we meet God in our desperation.”

I talked about few weeks ago about how sometimes we believe we need to bring a holy, more sanctified version of ourselves before God, but the Psalms give us

language to bring our true, unfiltered, selves. The story of Naomi in Ruth chapter 1, in all its gritty tragedy, shows someone dealing with many of the worsts that life can throw at us. Naomi is so upset by this injustice that she rails against God, blaming God for everything that has gone wrong.

Interestingly, the narrator of Ruth never tells us that Naomi is wrong to do this. Her cries and protests are presented without judgement:

- “this is a bitter pill for me to swallow... God has dealt me a hard blow” (v13),
- “I left here full of life, and God has bought me back with nothing but the clothes on my back” (v21), and
- “Why would you call me [Sweet]? God certainly doesn’t. The Strong one ruined me.” (vs 21)

Carolyn Custis James says, “.... there's a bit of Naomi in all of us. Hopefully, we won't come near her Job- like level of suffering, but we live in a fallen world and all of us, sooner or later, will drink deeply from its sorrows. Naomi is here to remind us that – in those long, bewildering phases of God's silence – our struggles are real and we can be honest about the state of our hearts. Her full story reminds us that our struggles are also important and that, even when there's nothing left but rubble, God is mysteriously at work in the mess.”

Ruth herself is evidence of God’s mysterious, messy work. I mentioned earlier the animosity between Israelites and Moabites. For early hearers of this story, Ruth is not expected to be the good guy, let alone the one who (spoiler alert) plays a key role in reversing Naomi’s misfortunes. Yet, with her “where you go, I’ll go” speech, she cements herself in Naomi’s life as a companion and ally, ready to have her back no matter what else life throws their way.

The podcast, Pulpit Fiction, points out that, “Kindness is not fixing - Ruth does not challenge or attempt to fix Naomi’s personal grief..., theological crisis..., or economic devastation - Ruth listens, walks with, clings to, and complains/murmurs with”.

So, what does this all mean for us? Firstly, when we bring ourselves to God all of us is welcome, even the bits that are angry and blaming God for real injustices in our lives and the lives of those around us. Secondly, God may send help in the form of the person we least expect. Finally, when walking alongside those who are experiencing tough times, it is not our job to have answers, rather we listen and have their back as we walk together with them into the unknown.

Theologian Megan Fullerton Strollo says, “Naomi’s story is one marred by fear, displacement, struggle, and grief. To read the book of Ruth as Naomi’s story means we have to linger in her grief, to accept her anger and frustration, and to tarry with her and Ruth—silent, resigned, burdened—on the road to Bethlehem.”

The final verse of chapter one brings a small piece of hope, with the mention that Ruth and Naomi have arrived back in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. The famine is now over. God has reversed the fortunes of Bethlehem, will God reverse the fortunes of Ruth and Naomi too? Tune in next week to find out!

A book I found helpful when preparing this service was 'The Gospel of Ruth' by Carolyn Custis James. This book is available to borrow through Whangarei Libraries.

Hymn – Blessed Be Your Name

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ey1LicbW7nY>)

We will now sing a song that echoes the words of Job, another person in the Bible known for their unjust suffering: “The Lord alone gives and takes. Praise the name of the Lord!” (Job 1:21). These are easy words to sing when it feels like God is giving, but much harder to sing when it feels like God is taking away. Yet, as I said earlier, we sing these songs as a global community, so if you cannot relate to these words today, sing them on behalf of those for whom these emotions are very real.

Offering Dedication

These gifts empower us to care for our church and for one another. We need to use them wisely.

These gifts make clear God’s love for the church, God’s love for each person in this faith community, and God’s love for those who can neither feel God’s love nor hope for that love.

God will bless these gifts as they go to work more effectively than we could ever imagine.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

From David Sparks, Responsive Prayers, Year B

Community Time – Celebrations, Notices etc

Prayer for Others

God of unconditional love, generosity, and enduring commitment, in our story of Ruth and Naomi today we found much we could relate to, so much pain that we can see in the world around us, and so we bring our prayers to you knowing that you are close to the broken-hearted.

We pray for those around the who are facing famine, whether environmental or intentional; we also pray for those in our community and country who are struggling to feed their families (*silence*).

We pray for those who are making their home in a new country; for those who are struggling with a new culture and language; and for those experiencing homesickness (*silence*).

We pray for those who are grieving the loss of their spouse (*silence*).
We pray for those who are grieving the loss of a child; and for those who are experiencing infertility (*silence*).

We pray for those who cry, “God has turned against me and made my life so hard” (*silence*).

Help us be the sort of people who, like Naomi, wrestle and protest in the face of grief and injustice, refusing to stop until wrongs have been made right.
In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

The Lord’s Prayer

**Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
As we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
Now and forever.
Amen.**

Hymn – [O Love That Will Not Let Me Go](#) (HFTC 486)

Blessing

May God bless you with joy: May you find moments of laughter and bliss in the midst of suffering and distress. May you cherish those times and may they sustain you.

May God bless you with the fruits of humility: May your humble and sacrificial actions be instrumental in preserving your community and loving your neighbours.

May God bless you with peace: In the face of hardship and uncertainty may you know the faithful presence of the God who provides.

Go in peace.
Love your neighbours.

You are not alone.
Amen.

Sung Amen x 3

*(Hymns reproduced with permission under
CCLI Music Reproduction Licence 221450)*