

30 August 2020

Christ Church New Southgate & Friern Barnet

Sermon: Rev. Israel Oluwole Olofinjana

Ruth 1.1-18

Good Morning Christ Church ! My name is Rev. Israel Oluwole Olofinjana, I'm a good friend of your pastor Rev Ruth Moriarty and Professor John and their wonderful kids. It's good to be with you today even if it's only virtually. I've been asked to share God's word with you today which I am going to do.

I am just going to pray and then share God's word. Father we thank you that you are a wonderful God. Thank you for Christ Church for the things that you are doing. Thank you for pastor Ruth, we thank you for the deacons too. We pray for your blessings on them as they begin to think about re-opening and work through risk assessments. We ask your blessings on them. Amen.

So I want to look at a topic today that I am going to call 'God's calling in time of crisis'. You might be wondering what is that about? I'm going to read some of the book of Ruth to you. Now you might be thinking 'Oh as Ruth's friend, he has chosen the bible text that speaks about Ruth. Well maybe there is something here we can learn together.

So this is a text if you have been in church circles for a while you will know. The book of Ruth is a very beautiful book. But to set it in context, the story of Ruth happens to be a time of national, geo-political change in the region. Particularly for the nation of Israel.

The story is set in-between patriarchal leadership and monarchy, between patriarchy and monarchy. When the rulers became kings. Anyone who is familiar with the history of the Old Testament will know that the patriarchs are the leaders, the fathers of the house, your Abraham, your Isaac, your Jacob, your Joseph, Moses – in that particular sense. And then go the kings – you talk about Saul, David and then the story goes on. But in-between two different leadership roles, two different ways of doing leadership there

was the time of the Judges and this is where the story of Ruth is situated.

The time of the Judges is a fascinating one. When you read the book of Judges itself, it says a lot about how the children of God didn't follow God as they should. So when you read the story of Ruth who was not part of the children of Israel and yet decided to follow Naomi and serve her God. The story brings a new dimension and so is very subversive in that sense. At a time when the children of Israel didn't want to follow Yahweh anymore, here was one Moabitess – someone who is not a Jew, someone who is not part of Israel decided to follow God and be faithful in that sense.

So there was lots of change going on but the personal change was important too. There are three women in this story: Orpah, Naomi and Ruth. These were respectable married women, because in those patriarchal days having a husband and children is respectable. Suddenly things change and they become widows, their personal situation has drastically changed. And it is the midst of that Ruth said 'I'm gonna follow Naomi', despite the fact that there was nothing that Naomi could possibly give her at this time. She said I am going to follow your God and your people. Ruth senses a calling at this particular time: God's call in time of crisis. It was a time of crisis nationally, in the region and also personally for Ruth. But despite those crises around her – she responded to God's call and then she was able to fulfil her destiny.

We've had the pandemic for a few months now, and that has reconfigured and reframed the world as it is. We are beginning to feel the consequences. We all lived through the pandemic, it's still around by the way. But now we are seeing the consequences. There is a lot of job loss, we are all grieving because we have lost, either people we know or someone connected to us. Ruth can relate to that – she lost her husband, she lost her father-in-law and people around her. Death is around her. In the midst of all these changes, she sensed a call.

And I think even despite the pandemic still being with us, and there are a lot of changes happening around us in our world, I think God might be calling us to do something significant.

So the question is this: what is God calling you to do? Is God calling you to take up the fight of racial injustice? Maybe you are sitting down in the congregation and there has been a burning sense in your heart 'we need to do something about racism'. Maybe now is the time to think and respond to that call. Maybe God is calling you to tackle the issue of

environmental crisis that we desperately face at the moment?

Maybe that is something the God might be laying on your heart. Or maybe God is saying its time to work with homeless people? Or maybe even work with foodbank? Just to volunteer, maybe just once a week? Maybe that is what God is saying to you. Or maybe God is saying to you it's time to go back to school? To do that masters degree you've been putting off? Maybe start that degree you never thought you would be able to do. What is God calling you to do? God's call comes in times of crisis.

Often we are waiting for God's call to happen at a time when there is peace, at a time when everything is fantastic and things are going well. But when you look through scripture, the significant calls happen in times of crisis. You look at the story of Abraham – it happened at a time of crisis. His family were fleeing the Ur of the Chaldeans and that was why God called him. The same with Moses. God called Moses when the children of Israel were sold in slavery for 430 years and God called Moses to respond. God calls in time of crisis, and we are definitely in a time of crisis at the moment. So therefore – what is God calling you to do?

Or maybe God is preparing you for something through the experiences you are going through. Maybe like Ruth and Naomi you have lost someone and it is very sad and we are lamenting because we have lost someone. But in the midst of lament there is something about God bringing peace and hope to us. And through that peace and hope we receive comfort, and can comfort others, we are able to encourage others.

So I want to encourage you this morning: what is that calling that God is placing on you? It might just be connecting with your Muslim neighbour, it might be as simple as that. It might be buying food for your neighbour, it might be reaching out to the person on the other side of the street – it might be as simple as that, or could be something more profound. That call will be very different for each person and we all have to discern what that call is. It is my prayer that God will enable you to answer his call in this time of crisis.

Let us pray: Father I thank you for the people of Christ Church and everyone listening to this message. I do ask and pray that you will use it to reach out to people, people who are grieving who have lost someone – I pray Lord that you will comfort them, that you will be with them at this difficult time that you would be with them, or if someone has lost their job that you would be with them. I pray that even as we experience national and international crisis, or

even a personal one, that as you call us to do significant things for you, I pray that we will respond, that we will be bold and courageous and step out. We ask this in Jesus' precious name. Amen. God bless you.