

31 October 2021

Ruth 1.1-18

¹ In the days when the judges ruled, 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 realised that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

Psalm 146

¹ Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul:

while I live I will praise the Lord;

² While I have any being: I will sing praises to my God.

³ Put not your trust in princes:

nor in flesh and blood, which cannot save.

⁴ For when their breath goes from them, they return again to the earth:

and on that day all their thoughts perish.

⁵ Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob:

whose hope is in the Lord their God,

⁶ The God who made heaven and earth: the sea, and all that is in them,

⁷ Who keeps faith for ever:

who deals justice to those that are oppressed.

⁸ The Lord gives food to the hungry: and sets the captives free.

⁹ The Lord gives sight to the blind: the Lord lifts up those that are bowed down.

¹⁰ The Lord loves the righteous: the Lord cares for the stranger in the land.

¹¹ He upholds the widow and the fatherless:

as for the way of the wicked, he turns it upside down.

¹² The Lord shall be king for ever: your God, O Zion, shall reign through all generations.

Praise the Lord.

Hebrews 9.11-15

¹¹ But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation.

¹² He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, so obtaining eternal redemption. ¹³ The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.

¹⁴ How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

¹⁵ For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance – now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

Mark 12.13-17, 28-34

¹³ Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. ¹⁴ They came to him and said, 'Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay the poll-tax to Caesar or not? ¹⁵ Should we pay or shouldn't we?' But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. 'Why are you trying to trap me?' he asked. 'Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.'

¹⁶ They brought the coin, and he asked them, 'Whose image is this? And whose inscription?' 'Caesar's,' they replied. ¹⁷ Then Jesus said to them, 'Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.' And they were amazed at him.

²⁸ One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, 'Of all the commandments, which is the most important?'

²⁹ 'The most important one,' answered Jesus, 'is this: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."

³¹ The second is this: "Love your neighbour as yourself." There is no commandment greater than these.'

³² 'Well said, teacher,' the man replied. 'You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. ³³ To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.'

³⁴ When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

Sentence

Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back. Luke 6.38

Prayer of the Day

O God, whose blessed Son came into the world that he might destroy the works of evil and make us your children and heirs of eternal life:

grant that, having this hope, we may purify ourselves as he is pure;

that, when he comes again with power and great glory,

we may be made like him in his eternal and glorious kingdom;

where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.



If someone was to ask you what was the most important part of being a Christian what would you say? Some of us might say: 'come to church'; or 'live a good life'; or 'Repent and be Baptised', or even 'give your heart to Jesus'. All of which are good answers but when Jesus was asked this question he

said: ³⁰ *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.* ³¹ *The second is this: "Love your neighbour as yourself."*

Interrogating a teacher with a series of questions formed a staple element in Rabbinic rhetoric and these questions we read today are part of a longer section in which Jesus is being asked questions. Jesus is in Jerusalem having made his triumphant entry and the Temple authorities have decided that Jesus is a risk and needs to go. So, they are looking for ways to make him say something which will either discredit him with the crowds or get him in trouble with the Roman authorities.



Jews resented paying the Roman tax, because it signified that they were under Roman Rule when they were already paying another tax to Herod plus the temple tax. To make matters worse the coin had Caesar's head on it which violated the rule about not making images of God, (people are made in the image of God) plus the coin's inscription stated that Caesar

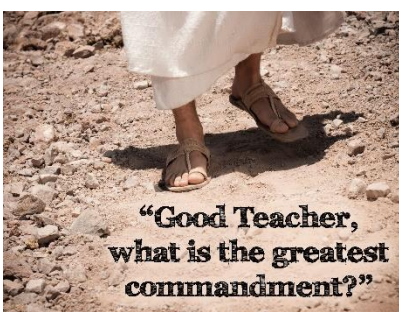
was divine, so devout Jews would not touch or look at one. Jesus makes them produce one, showing their hypocrisy, and then look at it.

Jesus' answer: Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's, not only avoids the political pitfalls but reminds his hearers what really counts: returning to God what belongs to God. This not a statement about dividing church and state but a simple directive to return what belongs to the government to the government, ie pay your taxes, and give to God what belongs to him. The Pharisees and Herodians were right in describing Jesus as they did: *we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.* Jesus



cares only what about God intends. His priority is always what God thinks. To see what the things of God are, people must step out of the categories which humans tend to use. The question should always be, not who is right, but which one represents God's viewpoint.

So, the question for us is what does belong to God?



A bit later a teacher of the law who had been listening to this debate and admiring Jesus' answers asks a question to which he genuinely wants an answer: Which is the greatest commandment? For the Jews there were hundreds of commandments and scholars spent many happy hours debating which had higher importance than the next.

Each Rabbi had their own solution to this question and the various responses were hotly debated at the time. Jesus' answer is different to the stock answers and in pleased surprise our lawyer agrees with him and understands the implications: *to obey these commands is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.*'

Pauls said something very similar in 1 Corinthians 13: *If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.*

The great Commandments contains 3 key elements of our faith:



“Love God.
Love others.
The rest are details.”

Jesus (Matthew 22:37-40)

1. Belief in the one true God
2. Wholehearted devotion to God
3. and loving our neighbour.

Nowadays there are not temples to different gods every where we go but there is still a temptation to make other things in our lives more important than our belief and devotion to God. The pull is perhaps more subtle but that is why we need to be more careful to be constant.

We do get so tied up in our rules and sometimes it is hard to remember what is Biblical and what is Traditional. We are Anglicans, we like to do things 'the right way', with dignity but we must be very careful that we never allow liking the way we do things to get in the way of loving our Lord and our neighbour. The church will need to change. The things which we find



so meaningful, have different connotations for people from different generations and cultural backgrounds and might need to be adapted as the years go by. We will need to ask ourselves if we love our traditions more than our lord and his people.

The list of virtues that we aspire to, being holy, a commitment to serving others rather than seeking one's own exaltation are all tied up in these commands. In every situation God asks us to follow the rule of love rather than man made rules. All the commands, coming to church, being faithful to our marriage vows, obeying civil law, tithing, even washing our hands can be understood as coming from our God who is the benevolent creator, who seeks healing and blessing for humanity.

We will be taking a little dip into Ruth over this couple of weeks, the verses at the end of our passage are often used at weddings, very romantic but Ruth originally said them to her mother-in-law, as words of dedication for life to live with her and look after her all her life. This is true love, no reward, expected, no guarantee of even food to eat but a perfect example of the love which Jesus calls us to live in our daily lives.

Jesus himself was, of course, the perfect example of unselfish love, he gave up so much for us and went through such agony so that the new covenant could be instituted; our consciences can be free; and we can receive eternal life. He did all that receiving no reward just because he loved us so much.

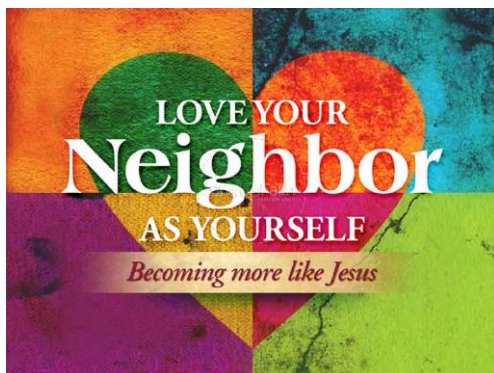
¹⁴ How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

¹⁵ For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance – now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.



We're made in God's image and because of that we will find our fullest meaning, our true selves the more we learn to love and worship our creator, the one we are designed to reflect. No half measure: heart soul, mind, and strength - that is every aspect of our lives is to be poured out gladly in worship of the one true God. Whatever we do. we do it for him. We come to

church to worship Him and then we live continuing to worship him through our lives.



Also notice that loving our neighbours is not instead of ourselves but 'as ourselves', we are expected to love ourselves and look after ourselves as well as our neighbours. Jesus repeated this command so often in his ministry, love one another, love your neighbour, love your brother, He really expects his followers to live it out, because he believes that God is fulfilling his ancient promise to renew people's hearts.

This passage enables us to understand fully Jesus' ministry.

Would anyone looking at us, our church, our lives guess that the man we claim to follow saw his followers as being people like this? Or to put it another way: when a crisis occurs what remains solid in our lives, our love for God and his people or a mad scramble to protect ourselves?

What belongs to God is everything of meaning, our lives, our love, our minds, our health: everything that he has given us, and he even provides what we need to give to the government and others.

