

Baptism Service

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[0:00] We can turn back to our reading in the book of Ruth, chapter 1. We read again at verse 16. In verse 15, Naomi has said to Ruth, 'See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods.

Return after your sister-in-law. But Ruth said, 'Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Today is a special day as we come to the sacrament of baptism.

We have families of two little children being baptized today. We have Iris Ruth McPhee and Martin Adam McLeod. And we have a great privilege, but also a responsibility.

We're not just asking the parents to raise their children in the Lord. We, as a congregation, hold that responsibility as well. That we pray for them, that we look out for them, that we encourage them, that we come alongside them.

[1:17] Today we will hear parents taking vows. But it reminds us that we are not just individual families here. We are a collective family with responsibilities.

We are a church family. And that's why the title of the sermon today is Family Matters. Because it's got two sides to it.

When we're looking at the book of Ruth, we see family matters in the sense of what is going on in this family. But we also see that family matters in the sense of people being precious to one another.

And that's what we have as a church as well. We have family matters, things that go on in all our lives, individually and collectively. But we also want to see that family matters in the sense of looking out for and having that sense of belonging to one another as well.

And seeking God's good over us. There's a proverb, I'm sure you've heard it. I think it's from Africa. It originated, it says, 'It takes a village to raise a child.'

[2:26] And the sense behind that proverb is that it's not just the burden on the parents to raise children. But the importance of a community actively engaged and encouraging in a positive way a safe place for children to be raised.

And that's on us all. To make this a safe place for children to be raised. But above all, a place we want to see these children and all our children nurtured.

And looked after that in a place of prayer. A place of worship. A place of praise. A place where we seek God's goodness and mercy over us all.

Because in baptism, as we come to it, we don't just look on the children who are precious to parents and to us all.

We see more than that. Our focus is not just on them. Our focus is on the one we come to worship. The one we come to commit them to.

[3:31] First and foremost, our focus is to be on Jesus Christ. Because behind baptism is that assurance, that confidence, that in Jesus we have a Redeemer.

One who is able to save. In the shorter catechism, the question asked is, what is baptism? And the answer is given like this. Baptism is a sacrament wherein the washing with water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost doth signify and seal our engrafting into Christ and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace and the engagement to be the Lord's.

So there was a great reminder to us there of what the blessing of baptism is. And especially in the last words, our engagement to be the Lord's. That is our longing for these children who will be baptized today, but for all our children, for all of us, our engagement to be the Lord's.

That we will come and know the blessing of Jesus Christ in our lives and in our hearts. As I was saying to the children, it's not a label. Just on the outside.

It's about what is going on in the heart and that the Lord would work in our hearts. Someone once said this of baptism.

[4:55] I may have said it before, but I think it's a good reminder to us. Baptism is like a precious jewel. Set apart by itself, it is nice and appealing, but has nothing within it to compel.

But place baptism against the backdrop of our sin and turn on the light of the cross and the jewel explodes with significance.

It's not just a special day for families and these children. It's a reminder to us of our sin, the cost of it, but the price that has been paid at the cross.

And that through the washing of our sin away, we have forgiveness with our Savior. And so today, this morning, we're going to look at the book of Ruth in this opening chapter.

And we're going to see how it shows us the reality of which we live today. The reality which we are raising children in a world today that's full of so many challenges.

[5:59] But it also shows joy. It shows hope. But above all, it points to a Redeemer, to Jesus Christ.

Family matters. And that's what we'll see here this morning from the book of Ruth. I want us to think of three things as we approach baptism that we see in these words before us.

We see love. We see loyalty. And we see a legacy. Love, loyalty, and a legacy. So the first thing we see here is love.

What's the setting for the book of Ruth, we might ask as we come into it? Well, it's not easy days. You see in the first verse there of chapter 1, in the days when the judges ruled.

So it was at this time there was no king over the people. Instead, it was judges that were ruling and seeking to lead the people in what was right in the Lord.

[7:04] But it wasn't going well. They were failing. And Ian, if you have your Bibles open, you see the previous page. It's the last verse of the book of Judges, chapter 21.

And look at the kind of setting that the book of Ruth is taking place in. Verse 25. In those days there was no king in Israel.

Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. So that's the setting we have in the days when the judges ruled, as you see at the beginning of the book of Ruth.

They did what was right in their own eyes. They weren't listening to what God was saying. There was no king. Everyone just did as they pleased themselves.

And as you look at this in terms of a nation that was doing right in their own eyes, we see how it comes into families.

[8:06] And this family of Elimelech. That's where we pick up in the book of Ruth. And we see what doing right in our own eyes looks like, what it leads to, and how it calls us back to God.

Ruth begins by saying to us, it was the days of the judges, and during these days there was a famine in the land. It wasn't just that there was a famine in the sense of these hard days, but this was God's judgment.

People doing what was right in their own eyes has led to God sending a judgment, a judgment that is to bring the people back to him. But what do we see?

Do they get it right? Do they do as they're meant to? Well, Elimelech and Naomi and their two sons, Malon and Chilion, who we join here as a family, they end up going to Moab.

Did they do what was right? Well, what would any husband and father do in this kind of situation? There's a famine. There's no food. The family are suffering.

[9:13] Surely we would say, well, a loving father would take his family to a place where they could get food. And what we see is that is what he did. Elimelech takes them to Moab.

But instead of being obedient, he was disobedient. You might ask, how? Well, what we see here is Elimelech doing what is right in his own eyes.

His name means, my God is king. That's what Elimelech means. My God is king. But what do his actions show?

His actions show, I do not trust my God is king. I do not trust that my God is able to help in this situation. And what we see as maybe, what we see as a loving decision to take his family to a place where there's food is actually taking them away from God.

Moab was a place of pagan gods, false gods. And when we look at the world in which we live and the world in which we are raising our children, these are the very challenges that we see all around us.

[10:24] The people doing right in their own eyes. No thought for God. Not just on a national scale, but families, individuals. We'll do things our own way.

So instead of addressing the problem, they have sinned against God, he takes things into his own hands and goes away.

Goes away to Moab. You could say it's a bit like having a boat that's leaking. It's leaking all the time. And you're still going out to sea and coming back in it.

And you're thinking, the leak's getting worse. What I'll do is I'll buy more pumps. So more pumps, the water's getting put out of the boat. It's still getting worse. More pumps. So it goes on.

Instead of actually dealing with the problem, you're just thinking, this will cure it. This will help me through. And it doesn't. Elimelech is like that. He's looking for a way to care for his family and love his family, but he's going the wrong way.

[11:25] Instead of looking at the sin in his own heart and the sin of the people around him, he goes away from God. And here is the challenge to us today.

We love our children. And we want what's best for them. But how do we love our children in a world where Christ and his word are not central?

That's the challenge to us. It is to love the Lord first and foremost. It's not to do what is right in our own eyes, but to do what is right according to the word of God.

It would be easy to say for our children, we just long for them to be happy, to find their own way, to be themselves. But is that loving them?

Elimelech thought he was loving his family by going to Moab, but he was taking them away from God. So our way of raising our children is not just to seek their own freedom, to be themselves, to do as they please, along as they're happy.

[12:29] It is to guide them in the ways of the Lord. Because one of the questions asked of the parents today is, do you promise to bring up this child in the nurture and training of the Lord?

It's a vow that's being taken, a vow that we engage with as a family in the church to encourage this, to enable this, to raise and nurture these children in the training of the Lord, so that we would love them by showing them the Lord.

The name Martin, behind that name is Warrior. The name Iris, behind that name is Rainbow, or Hope.

And wouldn't it be wonderful to love these children, to see them becoming warriors for the Lord, and ones that hope in the Lord. We love our children dearly.

They are precious to us. But it's not just the sense of sending them away into the world to find their own happiness, going away from God, but to seek the blessing of God on them, by loving them, by showing the ways of the Lord.

[13:47] To love is not to do what is right in our own eyes, but to seek the ways of the Lord. The second thing we see here is loyalty.

As the story goes on in Ruth, we see family life is one of mixed emotions. There's a lot of sadness in this book, especially in the opening chapter, when you see Naomi suffering grief, and losing her husband and her two sons.

There's a lot of sorrow. But in the midst of this, God shows grace. When you look at verse 6, Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited and given them food.

So this is back in our own country. The Lord had visited and given them food. God had been gracious. And this is the point in the story where there's a sense of turning, returning and renewing. But it's not all easy. Decisions had to be made. Naomi says that she is going to return, and Orpah and Ruth are going with her.

[15:06] They set out with her. But then you have a decision to make when Naomi turns and says, You go back to your own people. I have nothing to offer you.

Orpah returns to Moab. But then you have Ruth and the wonderful loyalty that she shows in verse 16. There's a great verse.

But Ruth said, Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go, I will go. And where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people will be my people.

And your God, my God. Is there anything better we could ask for families than for all to come and say these things, that your God will be my God.

Your people will be my people. But I just want to be part of this family of God. Is parenting easy today?

[16:03] If you're a parent, you know it's not. Because there are so many challenges. And we will fail as parents. We will fail as families. We will fail as a church family in many different ways.

And just look at Naomi here. Does she get everything right? No. Verse 8. But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, Go.

Return each of you to her mother's house. Go back. And what is it they're going back to? Well, you look at verse 15. What they are to go back to.

She said, See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. To her gods. You can see immediately the mistake she's making there.

Go back to your own gods. You can see that she's lost this sense of hope in her God. That she's almost got nothing to offer.

[17:03] But it's Ruth that reminds her where her loyalty should lie. It's Ruth that encourages her. And someone put it like this. The Lord can draw a straight line with a crooked stick.

And what we see here is the crooked stick is Naomi. When she's losing her hope in her own God. But yet in the end there's this straight line that is drawn.

That leads Ruth back. To a God. Away from the gods. The pagan gods. To the God of Israel. To the God of gods. And so yes, she doesn't get everything right.

She makes her mistakes. But somewhere along the way she has obviously told her daughters-in-law about her God. About the judgment he's brought probably.

But about also his goodness. She longs, as we see Ruth here, to know the God of Naomi. Even though in the midst of hardship and bitterness and all of these things.

[18:08] She still longs to know this God. And when we look at our lives with so many mixed emotions. So many different things that go on.

Isn't it wonderful to be able to point each other and our children to the God of Israel. To the God of God and the Lord of Lords. We make mistakes.

We don't always get things right. But we pray in it all that we will show a loyalty to God. And to Jesus as our Redeemer. And to show our children the ways of a loving Savior.

Our children are growing in a world that demands loyalty in so many different ways. But so many ways that take us away from God. What we want is that loyalty of Ruth for our children.

And do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where I go, where you go, I will go. And where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people.

[19:09] And your God, my God. Raise our children in the fear and nurture and admission of the Lord as our Lord first. So then we can show our children the Lord who we hope in.

And have a loyalty to him. There was a Christian soldier. And every night he would pray beside his bed. He would kneel beside his bed.

But as he did so, those around him, they would throw their shoes or whatever they could get their hands on at him. They would mock him and laugh at him.

And so the soldier went to speak to the chaplain and asked him for advice. What should I do?

Because this is what they are doing to me. And the chaplain said, well, what you could do is instead of kneeling by your bed, just lie in your bed and quietly in your own heart pray.

Pray for yourself, for what's going on, and for those around you. And so he heeded that advice. He listened to that advice. And a few days afterwards, the chaplain met him again and asked him, how are things going?

[20:15] And he said, well, I have followed your advice for three nights. I lay in my bed and prayed. But my conscience was troubling me because I was betraying my Lord.

And so I began to kneel beside my bed and pray out loud again. And what happened? Asked the chaplain. Well, I was amazed.

They no longer ridiculed me. Instead, now the 15 men in my camp are kneeling with me and listening to me pray. Loyalty to God is to be seen outwardly, not just kept inside.

And that's what we pray for our children. To be warriors, to be those who hope in the Lord, to be a witness to those around them. To be loyal, to be courageous, to be like Ruth.

Your God will be my God. We pray for that loyalty. The final thing we see here is a legacy. God has a plan to prosper.

[21 : 24] There's bitterness. There's bitter tears. There's sorrow in this chapter. But where is it leading? Well, it's leading to a sweet providence. They left Judah and went to Moab with hope initially with Elimelech.

But here is Naomi saying she's returning empty. She has lost everything. But there was hope. As you read into chapter 2, that first verse which I read, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech whose name was Boaz.

Things are about to change. A man whose name was Boaz, who was a kinsman, redeemer, one through whom they would be blessed.

It's an amazing story as you read through Ruth. And what I want to take from this is that we see it as we commit ourselves into the hands of God, commit our children into the hands of God, and trust him, he is able to do far more than we ask or imagine.

God is a faithful God. God is a just God. There is judgment for our sin. But there is hope in our Redeemer who is Jesus Christ.

[22 : 42] What do we want for our children? We want them to be healthy, to get on well. But above all, we long for them to see them following Jesus, to come with him.

As the shorter catechism says, We want to see them come to be the Lord's.

And we want to see a legacy passed on. Psalm 22, verse 30 says, Posterity shall serve him. It shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation.

They shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn that he has done it. When you think of the little children who are being baptized today, prayers for them didn't start when they were born.

Prayers were offered for their parents. And even for their parents before them, there is a legacy that is being passed on, that we are to share and be a part of in sharing the gospel, to proclaim the righteousness to a people yet unborn, that those who we baptize today would be those who pass on that legacy of the gospel of a Redeemer, who is Jesus Christ.

[24 : 05] Now, as you look at Ruth, and as you look further on, I just want to say there's a spoiler alert here. Because what we see is a legacy that comes out of chapter 1.

A wonderful legacy. You remember that Naomi was one who saw bitterness and tears. She said, Well, when you turn forward to the end of the book of Ruth, please do read through the whole thing in your own time.

We see in the verse 13, So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went into her, and the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son.

Then the woman said to Naomi, Blessed be the Lord who has not left you this day without a Redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel. He shall be to you a restorer of life, and a nourisher of your old age.

For your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him. Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse.

[25 : 16] A son was born whose name was Obed. And look at Naomi. She became the child's nurse. What a transformation had come.

From feeling so empty, her life is now full again with the blessing of God. And then when you go further on, into the book of Matthew, in the first chapter there, you have, if you like, a family tree, a genealogy.

In verse 5, This is the line, And where does it lead?

In verse 16 of Matthew 1, And Jacob, the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. And Mary was the mother of Jesus, who is called the Messiah.

Through this family, through all its sorrows and tears, came joy. They knew a kinsman, Redeemer, and Boaz who saved them. But it was all pointing towards a Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[26 : 25] What a legacy. What a blessing. And a blessing we seek for our children, and their children's children. We are a people who are gathered here as a family, to remember and see God's blessing on all, to be a people who pray, to see that legacy passed on, to know the wonder of the grace of God.

Amy Carmichael, she wrote this poem. Father, hear us. We are praying. Hear the words our hearts are saying. We are praying for our children.

Amen.