

Worship Material
Love, actually
Material from Roots Bible Study
Sunday 3rd November

Begin with an opening prayer

As we gather, may what we read
be treasured in our hearts
and inspire us to share God's Word
in our lives, so that we may turn
the written word into action in the world.

Amen.

Read Ruth 1:1-18

Bible notes

Biblical scholar Paula Gooder suggests that 'The book of Ruth is the ultimate love story. Love in the Old and New Testaments is much more about what you do than how you feel. Ruth has *hesed* (steadfast love) not because she talks about her emotion of love towards Naomi but because the whole of her life is lived out in expression of that love'¹. It is also an unusual love story, set in the violent times of the Book of Judges. The stories of Judges show the disaster that came about when God's people turned away from God. By contrast, Ruth shows the blessing that came to a foreigner who turned to Israel's God, and so became part of his faithful people. It also shows how those of different ethnicities and cultures can live together harmoniously. It has a lot to say to the times we live in. The land of Moab was to the south-west of Israel. The two fought often and Moab also raided and looted Israel when she had been defeated by other enemies. A Moabite woman would have been regarded as the lowest of the low (a bit like the Samaritans at the time of the Gospels). Knowing that life could be hard for her as a widow and even harder still for Orpah and Ruth as both widows and foreigners, Naomi urges her daughters-in-law to return to their homes. Orpah and Ruth make different choices. While Ruth becomes the central figure of the book and celebrated for her choice, it is interesting to note that there is no criticism of the choice that Orpah makes - a

reminder perhaps that when it comes to big family decisions, it is often a case of different choices rather than right or wrong ones.

¹ Paula Gooder, *Everyday God*, Canterbury Press, 2012, p.46

Prayer

God of our days and our decisions,
when we take the easy option in life
and spurn the possibilities of change,
forgive us and challenge us.

When we turn away from those we could stand by,
forgive us and challenge us.

When we allow bitterness to tarnish our spirits and darken our hearts,
forgive us and challenge us.

When we allow tragedy to define and not shape us,
forgive us and challenge us,
that we may grow in wisdom, grace and love.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

A prayer to conclude

Thank you, steadfast God, for your forgiveness
and for your assurance that: where we go, you go;
where we stay, you stay. Though we may turn our back on you and
begin to walk away, you are always there to embrace, affirm and to
call us back, in life and in death. In Jesus' name.

Amen.