

Junior Church: Young Peoples' Group

Some Thoughts for the Week Beginning 12th July 2020

Hello Everyone,

How has your week been? On a rare visit into Redhill town centre this week I noticed more young people wearing school uniform and so I imagine that some of you will be back at school. It's hard to imagine what that must be like after months of home learning.

One of the sad things about lockdown has been the cancellation of events such as the Olympic Games, Glastonbury music festival, Chelsea Flower Show and hundreds of village fetes up and down the country.

One of this year's anniversaries, the celebration of which has also been cancelled, is the [400th anniversary of the sailing of The Mayflower](#). On board were 'Pilgrim Fathers' or "Saints" as they called themselves. They were men and women who sought a new life of religious freedom in America. There were also economic migrants on board seeking a better life in the New World.

It is hard to contemplate the strength of faith that spurred them to undertake this dangerous ocean crossing to an alien country. 102 passengers and 34 crew sailed in a boat that was shorter in length than my back garden. They encountered great storms and were horribly seasick. The journey took 66 days of unimaginable squalor. Within months of arriving about half of those who started the journey had died from cold, malnutrition and disease.

One family on the ship came from Dorking and the house they left behind still stands in West Street. William Mullins was a shoemaker. He died within 2 months of arriving in America and his wife and one of his two children also died. His daughter Pricilla survived, married and had children.

The picture shows an 11th generation descendant of William on a visit to the Dorking house of his ancestor. The descendants of the Mullins family included one American president, vice president and, from the world of entertainment, Marilyn Monroe, Orson Welles and Dick Van Dyke. How different a history it would have been had William not made the journey. Also in the picture is a representation of *The Mayflower* showing it being tossed about on huge waves and assailed by sea monsters.

The story of William Mullins is the story of many, many millions of forced migrants down the centuries, undergoing great dangers to find a place that would accept them, of hardship endured to establish themselves, of integration into a new country and, ultimately, making their own unique contribution to the prosperity, diversity and culture of their adopted land.

There are parallels between the hardship and dangers of migration experienced by William and those of today's migrants. You can think of the migrants fleeing war and political turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa who make the journey across the Mediterranean. Even if they survive, there is the struggle to be accepted and taken in by another country. Today there are estimated to be 26 million refugees worldwide, half of whom are under 18.

It was [Refugee Week](#) a couple of weeks ago. The theme was 'imagine'. You were invited to imagine what it is like to leave your home and family. You were invited to imagine a kinder world of open borders and welcoming people.

Tracing your ancestors has become hugely popular, often referred to as genealogy, and spurred on by the popularity of programmes such as '*Who Do You Think You Are*'. I'm sure that most of us have migrants or refugees in our family histories. Both my grandmothers emigrated to Canada from Ireland, although thankfully for me they both returned.

The author of Matthew's Gospel was so fascinated by ancestry that he opens the Gospel with a list of names covering 42 generations from Abraham through to King David and finally Jesus. His purpose in doing this was to show the lineage of Jesus and fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies.

The list is interesting. It's a list of men, because Jewish society was patriarchal, but the names of five women are included, one of whom is Ruth. The Old Testament [Book of Ruth](#) is one that we have chosen to study during Bible Month. It is remembered first for its example of devoted friendship between Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi. But it is also a story of migration. As is so often the case, the motivating factor behind Naomi's decision to leave her home country and travel to a foreign land was hunger. She found herself living amongst the Moabites, a longstanding enemy of the Jews. Like my grandmothers, she eventually returned to her home in Israel following the deaths of her husband and her two sons. She returned with her Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth.

A few years ago I experience life as a traveller through Moab, now part of Jordan. With some companions we walked through the beautiful but arid and rugged landscape, sleeping in tents and existing on the water that we brought with us. Water was for drinking, not washing. I imagined Ruth and Naomi travelling together through this barren land, wondering how Ruth, a Moabite woman with no husband, would be received in the land of the Jews.

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of this little Book of Ruth was to remind the Jewish people, and all of us today, of our mixed heritage. If Naomi had not moved to Moab, history might have been different. In our own church we are much more culturally diverse than when I first came to Redhill, a migrant from Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland to Scotland and then to England. And how much richer is our church life as a result. And how much greater are the possibilities because of our diversity.

Enjoy the better weather this coming week.

Rodney