

Sermon - 11/07/21
Ps 127; Ru 3:1-5; 4:13-17; He 9:24-28; Mk 12:38-44
Service of Holy Communion

We have before us the beautiful story of Ruth and Naomi. Recall that during a famine in Judah, Naomi and her husband moved to Moab. They were going where there was food. Naomi bore two sons and they grew up in their adopted country and married local girls. But death struck Naomi's family hard. All the men, first her husband, then her two sons passed away within a short time. Then, famine came upon Moab. There was nothing left for Naomi.

Women in our time of history would not be completely undone by such a tragedy. We would grieve and then find a way to support ourselves and our families. Not so in the Ancient Near East. A woman could not do anything in the court – or any business concerning land and property without a brother, a husband or a son. So, Naomi returns to her family in Judah – to the little town of Bethlehem.

Today, we jump into the middle of the story. Ruth is the Moabite daughter-in-law who clung to Naomi and declared that she would travel with her to Judah – to be her companion, to care for her and to worship the God Naomi worshiped. These two women have nothing. They surely have asked for help from Naomi's family and for a place to live. They depend upon the grain that Ruth brings home to put a meal on the table. Naomi has a plan to get Ruth a home of her own – and the protection and covering of a husband. Now, Boaz, Naomi's kinsman, has noticed Ruth gleaning in his fields. He approves of her demeanor and her hard work. He knows the situation. He has heard of Ruth's devotion to her mother-in-law. Boaz is a righteous and good man. The events of the next twelve hours will bring a huge change in these poor women's lives.

Let's shift the scene from maybe the 9th c BC to 1st c AD Jerusalem – at the great Hebrew Temple – built by Zerubbabel and now being refurbished and enlarged by Herod the Great. Jesus is with His disciples in one of the temple courts. They are within view of the treasury. There is a large giving box where worshipers can put in their offerings.

Jesus is teaching. "Beware of these teachers of religious law! For they like to parade around in flowing robes and receive respectful greetings as they walk in the marketplaces. ³⁹ And how they love the seats of honor in the synagogues and the head table at banquets. ⁴⁰ Yet they shamelessly cheat widows out of their property and then pretend to be pious by making long prayers in public. Because of this, they will be more severely punished." (Mk 12:38-40 NLT) We have heard Jesus' opinion of the church leaders of the time. Recall the story Jesus told about the church leader and the tax collector:

"Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax man. The Pharisee posed and prayed like this: 'Oh, God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, crooks, adulterers, or, heaven forbid, like this tax man. I fast twice a week and tithe on all my income.'

¹³ "Meanwhile the tax man, slumped in the shadows, his face in his hands, not daring to look up, said, 'God, give mercy. Forgive me, a sinner.'" ¹⁴ Jesus commented, "This tax man, not the other, went home made right with God. If you walk around with your nose in the air, you're going to end up flat on your face, but if you're content to be simply yourself, you will become more than yourself."

(Lu 18:9-14 MSG)

Let's rejoin Jesus and His disciples. He makes an important statement about the church leadership.

Let's think about an institution that allows its most important representatives to steal from widows and extort money from those who are supposed to be in their care and protection. Isn't the whole thing corrupted by those who practice deceit and are greedy for personal gain?

Then, Jesus sees a widow walking toward the treasury. She puts two copper coins in the collection box. Meanwhile, the wealthy are putting in huge amounts for the Temple. She is like Naomi and Ruth – widows with nothing. They are poor and at the mercy of anyone who wishes to take advantage of them. Jesus says,

(Continued on next page.)

“The truth is that this poor widow gave more to the collection than all the others put together. All the others gave what they’ll never miss; she gave extravagantly what she couldn’t afford—she gave her all.” (Mk 12:44)

Considering her income, which is nearly nothing, the widow has come trusting God to provide for her needs. She has given all the money she has. She intends to give it to the Lord’s work. She intends to honor God with her gift.

But wait a minute. If she is giving to a corrupt church organization, is she really doing good? Is she not being duped by the priests and scribes and religious teachers?

What is your judgment in the matter? Who will care for this widow? Who will provide for her needs? Not the hierarchy of the institution. Is she wise or foolish to put her last bit of money into the church offering box?

I believe Jesus is saying that this poor widow’s trust is in the right place. She is trusting the Creator God to take care of her. She believes the promises God has given His people.

Meanwhile, back in Bethlehem in the eighth or ninth century BC Naomi tells Ruth to dress in her finest clothes and call upon Boaz on the threshing floor where he is managing the barley harvest. Ruth is to uncover Boaz’s feet and lie down there until he sees her. This is not an act of seduction. Naomi has made a plea that her kinsman-redeemer will either marry Ruth – or will find her a husband. When a startled Boaz wakes up in the middle of the night and sees Ruth, she tells him what Naomi told her to say: “I am Ruth, your maiden; take me under your protecting wing. You’re my close relative, you know, in the circle of covenant redeemers—you do have the right to marry me.” (Ru 3:9)

Boaz, the kinsman-redeemer, quickly goes to the court the next day and arranges to marry Ruth, and to take Naomi, his kinswoman, into his household.

As Boaz covered Ruth with his cloak, so his distant grandchild in the 1st c AD will cover every widow, every orphan, every alien, migrant and refugee with His blood of the New Covenant.

The New Covenant in Christ’s blood is still in full effect to cover each one who calls to Him and believes Him for deliverance from wrong and for eternal life. Amen.