

Scripture Readings and Sermon

November 7, 2021 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Ruth 2:2-12; 4:13-17

Without husbands or sons, Ruth and Naomi were completely dependent upon the kindness of their community. At that time, those without means to provide were allowed to “glean” or gather the remains of any crops left after the own reaped the fields. God led Ruth to Boaz's field just as Boaz returned from Jerusalem. Even then, however, Boaz had heard of Ruth's story and was impressed not with how Ruth had cared for Naomi but also with her work in the field. Boaz's response to Ruth indicates that Boaz was already attracted to Ruth before the encounter on the threshing floor in the next chapter (the original reading from lectionary). Rather than focusing on Ruth “uncovering” Boaz's feet, the encounter in the field reveals much about Boaz's faith and Ruth's commitment to care for Naomi. The practice of gleaning continues today through the work of the Society of St. Andrew. Crops that do not meet the attractiveness standards of grocery retail stores are often left in the field. Volunteer gleaners gather these for use by food pantries.

Ruth 2:10 "Why have I found favor in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?"

When have you been surprised by a blessing?

Is it a coincidence that Ruth happens to choose Boaz's field?

Can you see God leading Ruth? Where is God leading you?

When have others heard good reports about you?

How have these reports of actions you thought went unnoticed affected you?

How has God blessed you through your obedience?

Commentary on Hebrews 9:24-28

Within the writings of the early church, it is important to pay attention to the name of Jesus the Christ. When the early writers spoke of his life, teachings, and death, they refer to Jesus. When they refer to his heavenly presence, they use the title Christ. In his divinity, they refer to Christ Jesus and in his bodily ascension they use Jesus Christ. After focusing on the suffering Jesus and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the author of Hebrews switches to a heavenly view of Christ. The Temple is now heaven and the sacrifice is Christ, the Lamb of God. This picture of the divine Christ who will "save those who are eagerly waiting him" is picked up in the Book of Revelations.

Hebrews 9:28 “so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.”

Are you eagerly waiting for him?

How do we stay “eager” after so many decades of waiting?

Which do expect to happen first, the second coming or your death?

What if we viewed both the same and simply asked “Am I ready”?

How does this season of All Saints, Thanksgiving, and Advent help you get ready?

Commentary on Mark 12:38-44

While one scribe agrees with Jesus that the greatest commandment is love of God and neighbor, Jesus points out that not all the religious teachers feel the same way. There are scribes who love themselves more than others and abuse their standing in the community. Prayers, which are meant to be expressions of love for God have been turned into opportunities to earn money from widows who would pay the scribes to say a prayer for them. Against this example of what it means not to love God

and neighbor, Jesus lifts up the widow who gives all she has to the treasury. True love is to give all you have to the one you love - heart, mind, and strength - without thought of self. Unlike the pompous scribes who glorified only themselves, the widow glorified God through her humble sacrifice.

Mark 12:44 "But she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

Is this about money or about commitment?

If it is just about money, why does the God of all need money?

If it is about commitment, what does this say about those who gave out of abundance?

Is it easier to commit to God when things are going well?

What does it mean to commit to God even when you are left with nothing?

Reflection on Ruth 2:2-12; 4:13-17, Hebrews 9:24-28, Mark 12:38-44

Sermon "All In"

Like Ruth's commitment to Naomi in last week's reading, the widow in Mark is "all in". Jesus says that she has given everything she has to live on to the Temple. The Temple is not just a building but is an entire social system that praises God and cares for God's people. The Temple and those that work there like the scribes are charged with caring, as the prophets say, "for the widow and the orphan". How ironic then that the scribes seem to only care for themselves while it is a widow giving everything she has to the Temple.

This is not an issue of tithing or even stewardship. This is an issue of commitment. While the scribes treat religion as a job, the widow has given everything to God. The two coins are simply symbols of a deeper commitment to God. By faith, God called her to give what she had on that day to the Temple treasury. Because she was obedient, Jesus was able to point to her sacrifice (symbolic of his own impending sacrifice) as an example of what it means to follow God. While the unknown scribes received their reward in temporary honors, that widow will be remembered as long as scriptures are read for her faithfulness. We often don't know why God asks us to do things at certain times and places but if we are faithful then the outcome will have ripples we cannot even imagine.

When Ruth made her commitment to Naomi, she had no assurance of an easy life, a husband, or even children. She committed herself to care for Naomi. Because they were hungry, she humbled herself as a beggar to glean a stranger's field. God, however, led Ruth to Boaz's field on the same day it was being reaped and on the day Boaz returned from Jerusalem. As a distant kinsman of Naomi, Boaz had heard of Ruth's commitment and sacrifice which meant even more when he saw how hard she worked. Through Boaz, the LORD blessed Ruth with not only food but protection and a future husband and child. Ruth gave everything to God and God blessed her in ways she could not even imagine.

As believers in Christ, we have accepted the offer of forgiveness made possible through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus. By giving everything to Jesus, he gives us everything we need. We are freed from the power of sin and destruction. Like Ruth, we are "all in" accepting whatever path the Jesus calls us to follow. As the widow gave what she had to live on to God, we give our lives to God and take up the crosses we are given. We wait anxiously for Christ to come again and take us home. But until that day, let us remember to give thanks for the unexpected blessings and the opportunities to be a blessing to others.