

St Peter's Anglican Church, Bundoora

25th Sunday After Pentecost / Defence Force Sunday and In Service Baptism

Sunday 10/11/2024

Reading Ruth 3:1-5 & 4:3-17 / 10-7 Ps 127 / Hebrews 9:23-28 / Mark 12:38-44

(Readings are from New Revised Standard Version)

Sermon Theme:

By Rev'd Stephen Monsieigneur

Ruth 3:1-5 & 4:3-17

¹ Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, 'My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you. ² Now here is our kinsman Boaz, with whose young women you have been working. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing-floor. ³ Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing-floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. ⁴ When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do.' ⁵ She said to her, 'All that you tell me I will do.' ³ He then said to the next-of-kin, 'Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our kinsman Elimelech. ⁴ So I thought I would tell you of it, and say: Buy it in the presence of those sitting here, and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if you will not, tell me, so that I may know; for there is no one prior to you to redeem it, and I come after you.' So he said, 'I will redeem it.' ⁵ Then Boaz said, 'The day you acquire the field from the hand of Naomi, you are also acquiring Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead man, to maintain the dead man's name on his inheritance.' ⁶ At this, the next-of-kin said, 'I cannot redeem it for myself without damaging my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it.' ⁷ Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, one party took off a sandal and gave it to the other; this was the manner of attesting in Israel. ⁸ So when the next-of-kin said to Boaz, 'Acquire it for yourself', he took off his sandal. ⁹ Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, 'Today you are witnesses that I have acquired from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. ¹⁰ I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, to be my wife, to maintain the dead man's name on his inheritance, in order that the name of the dead may not be cut off from his kindred and from the gate of his native place; today you are witnesses.' ¹¹ Then all the people who were at the gate, along with the elders, said, 'We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you produce children in Ephrathah and bestow a name in Bethlehem; ¹² and, through the children that the Lord will give you by this young woman, may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.' ¹³ So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son. ¹⁴ Then the women said to Naomi, 'Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! ¹⁵ 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 borne him.' ¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. ¹⁷ The women of

the neighbourhood gave him a name, saying, 'A son has been born to Naomi.' They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Ps 127

¹ Unless the Lord builds the house:
their labour is but lost that build it.
² Unless the Lord keeps the city:
the watchmen watch in vain.
³ It is in vain that you rise up early and go so late to rest,
eating the bread of toil:
for the Lord bestows honour—and on those whom he loves.
⁴ Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord:
and the fruit of the womb is his gift.
⁵ Like arrows in the hand of a warrior:
are the children of one's youth.
⁶ Happy the man who has his quiver full of them:
he will not be put to shame
when he confronts his enemies at the gate.

Hebrews 9:23-28

²³ Thus it was necessary for the sketches of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves need better sacrifices than these. ²⁴ For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. ²⁵ Nor was it to offer himself again and again, as the high priest enters the Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own; ²⁶ for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷ And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgement, 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.

Mark 12:38-44

³⁸ As he taught, he said, 'Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted **with respect** in the market-places, ³⁹ and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honour at banquets! ⁴⁰ They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.' ⁴¹ He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴² A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. ⁴³ Then he called his disciples and said to them, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. ⁴⁴ For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.'

SERMON

I have often been impressed and inspired by the actions of the widow in today's gospel passage, giving "all she had to live on." My first reaction has typically been to experience a sense of warmth as I metaphorically sit under the glow of generosity and love I perceive the widow's action displays.

But as we deal with the ongoing pressures of daily life, whether in our church or individual contexts, I am reminded of the difficulties, the many opposing demands that make such a simple gesture so challenging. With recent events around the world where evil appears to have trumped good, I have found myself asking why did the widow put in her last coins? Was it generosity or is there some other factor at play? Why do I give even to the church itself?

Some versions of today's passage replace the words 'greeted with respect' in verse 38 of the gospel with 'greeted obsequiously'. An obsequious person is a follower, a person who exhibits a care for others that appears overeager. While appearing admirable caution should prevail. For the obsequious person their attention is not primarily driven or guided by a real depth of concern for the other but a belief that through such display of commitment a benefit will be received.

The gospel opens with Jesus delivering a warning, he is denouncing the scribes, *and others* not for being who or what they are but for their abuse of their position and opportunity. The scribes are leaders in the community, they are experts in interpretation of the Jewish Law, which is the foundation of societal function in their world. They are a group with both power and authority, they are respected, and their decisions carry real outcomes and influence.

While I like many have been happy to focus on a Jesus admiring the widow, perceiving her actions as a great example of generosity and faith in God, have we been missing another perspective, another more important message?

When Jesus is speaking about the situation, is he speaking with admiration or exasperation? Is he full of admiration for the actions of the widow or deplored by a situation that exists in which her actions serve another purpose? Does the widow truly give from a heart of generosity and faith, or rather does she feel that she has no choice but to hand over all she has to meet the requirements of the law.

While we are created in God's image we cannot escape the reality of our earthly existence, the need for nutrition, warmth etc for our bodies, the fact that we live in communities where for good or ill power is not equally distributed. These dual realities create a tension as we strive to grow spiritually while through various means we attend to the physical.

As Christians, as members of Christ body we individually and corporately are called to not only to serve but to serve with humility. We are called to serve God through the example of Jesus which was to serve others. This is the call that today on behalf of Sienna; Bastian, Demi, Sammantha and we the church will be answering. But we must be certain that we answer for the right reasons because in answering God's call, we are agreeing to guide Sienna as she grows not just into knowing about Jesus, but knowing Jesus and discerning what service and relationship with him looks like in her life. We are assuming a responsibility to prepare her so that as an adult she will make her own profession of faith fully understanding the nature and implication of her consent.

There is no such thing as a community of strangers, and while life is demanding we are called not so much to make time, but take time to nurture our relationship with Jesus. We need to take time regularly to disconnect with the material world and spend time in prayer, reflecting on our performance as we journey in faith, take time to praise God and all that God does for us, time to humbly put ourselves good, bad, highs and lows before God.

Both understandings of this gospel have merit. We can admire the widow's generosity and demonstration of faith in God; while realising just how easy it is to lose sight of who and why we serve. When giving becomes a competition or box to be ticked we have let worldly priorities gloss over those that give us spiritual nourishment and fill us with an eternal hope. Each one of us from the youngest and newest to oldest and longest serving are equal in God's eyes and together we are the church whose charge is to continue the mission of Jesus, serving humbly all who we meet and those we do not know not because it gains us favour but because God through Christ and the Holy Spirit simply out of boundless love serves us.

AMEN