

**SERMON: 2018/11/11 (25th Sunday aft. Pentecost, Yr. B - Track 1) -
Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17; *Psalms* 127; *Hebrews* 9:24-28; and, *Mark*
12:38-44_BTR**

[Invite children to the front. Have a headscarf and a gardening-fork or similar.]

Last week I began telling you a true story from the Book of *Ruth*.
And do you remember who the main character was?

[Wait for reply.]

That's right! "Ruth."

But do you remember that there was another woman and that our story began
with her?

Who am I thinking of?

[Wait for reply.]

Yes! Naomi.

And she left her home in Bethlehem in Israel and took a very long and difficult
journey (over the Judean hills and across the river Jordan) to a foreign country
called, "Moab."

She went there with her husband and two sons looking for a better life.

But, in that strange place, things only got worse. Everyone that Naomi loved died!
And yet, she made a new friend - and this was Ruth.

Well, Naomi decided, in her sadness, to go back home again. And she told Ruth to
stay in Moab, but Ruth had made a commitment to Naomi and wouldn't "go back
on her word."

So, the two women went to Bethlehem together.

When they got there, however, they couldn't find any work.

They were hungry and tired; and then Naomi spotted her cousin, Boaz.

Boaz was a kind man - a kind man and a rich one.

And he said that they could come and work on his farm, collecting the crops - and
he hired them even though he didn't need them! Ruth thought this was very sweet
and she asked Boaz to marry her: that's right, *she* asked him.

And he said, "Yes." And they lived happily ever after. And had many children, including King David's grandfather, 'Obed'.

(And since King David is the great, great-...[etc.] grandfather of Jesus, that means Jesus isn't just a Jew, but a Gentile like us too.)

Let's pray: Father God, ???, in Jesus' name, amen.

[Ask children to leave.]

We've been following Jesus' progress in *Mark* for a while now; and last time we were together, I mentioned, in passing, that He had arrived in Jerusalem with the Apostles.

And, according to this account, He did little else in the city except loiter around the Temple, 'teaching'. [Mk. 12:35]

Or at least that is what He set out to do - to offer extended meditations on various topics like the "End Times," taxation, etcetera - but, *repeatedly*, He was interrupted by those who worked there - the professionally-religious, who sought to "derail" Him, to divert and distract Him.

They were hecklers, really;

looking for an argument - an ugly 'confrontation'. [n.1]

And with good reason - they had understandable motive: this *whole* section began with Jesus 'driv[ing] out those who were buying and selling there.' [Mk. 11:15]

He had, then, "kicked the hornets' nest," and now, like annoying "gadflies," the wasps from within - the "scribes" and the priests - were responding by disrupting His talks; tit for tat - like children in the sandpit: you knocked over my sandcastle, now I'm going to throw your toys out. And this theological sparring - these hit-n-run verbal "assaults" on Jesus as a public figure, as a spiritual authority, went on for a few *days*.

Probably exhausted, then, or certainly, at least, exasperated with fruitless debates about political and theological questions', [n.2] we find that, *finally*, '[Jesus] sat down' for a "breather." [Mk. 12:41]

And where?

'[O]pposite the treasury'. [v.41]

- Specifically, this was the *Temple* treasury, which 'was in a sense the national bank of Israel in Jesus' time; it was a powerful national treasury that did not let its great wealth sit idle. The bank loaned the money it collected at *very high interest rates*. These unjust lending practices drove many residents into extreme poverty and created the vast slums of Jerusalem.' [n.3]

And though Jesus *hated* the corruption and exploitation associated with this place, He had encouraged, don't forget, that His disciples should themselves be contributors: [Mt. 17:24-27].

Why?

Because no one can really opt out.

We're all compromised, intertwined - the good with the bad; and what matters most of all, actually, is one's attitude to God - because this I *can* control - which is concealed within the purpose of the giver - 'For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also', He taught: [Mt. 6:21].

Money, in other words, is a *reliable* guide as to the sincerity of one's faith.

We, of course, squirm at the idea, but *Jesus* is the one who links them; and so He 'sat', curious, to observe His contemporaries piety - their devotion - in a place where He thought it would be most visible.

And what did He see?

A 'poor widow came and...put in everything she had'. [Mk. 12:42-44]

Now, most of us find the mindset of a person who'd do such a thing incomprehensible.

All she had?

Isn't that foolish?

Short-sighted?

But you know, a few generations ago, multitudes also gave their "everything" - their lives, their futures, their hopes and their dreams - on fields of battle mostly in Europe but also in many other foreign parts too, and they did that because they saw it as their *duty* to do so; to *reciprocate* to "King and Country" for opportunities and privileges enjoyed only by an accident of birth:

We could have been born anywhere, after all, and there were, even as late as the early Twentieth Century, countries where people had very few rights at all, but lived - or died! - at the discretion of unaccountable, unimpeachable, dictatorial monarchs: in the Ottoman Empire, for example, where time seemed stuck in the Middle Ages, or, similarly, as a "serf" in the those vast Russian steppes. And, recognising their good fortune - the advantages bestowed on them by circumstances over which they had no control - millions of men here, in America, in Britain and her colonies, willingly donned ill-fitting, uncomfortable uniforms "to do their bit."

And many are still motivated to do likewise.

Perhaps you remember a story from a few years back about a Hungarian-Jewish man, Tibor Rubin, who was saved from the concentration camps of the Nazis by

Allied soldiers. '[O]ut of gratitude', he, and I quote, 'pledge[d] to give something back to the country that had given him his freedom,' and he went to fight with the U.S. army in Korea in the fifties - where, coincidentally, both my own and Rebekah's grandfathers fought.

'[S]ingle-handedly', he 'defended a hill...against a massive onslaught, ...mann[ing] a machine gun and [holding] off waves of attackers on his own', before being captured by the Chinese, and spent almost three years being starved and tortured in a P. O. W. facility before his release was negotiated. [n.4]
Fifty-five years later, George Bush Jr. awarded Corporal Tibor the Medal of Honour, who, in conclusion, said of his new home: "'It's wonderful [and] beautiful [here]. We are all very lucky!'" [n.5]

And as a Christian, that sentiment strongly resonates with me:

I too am "very lucky."

Very lucky because though I have wandered and strayed like a lost sheep, there is a mighty, ancient, ageless "shepherd" who never tired of searching for me; of longing to have me back in His fold. And who went to extraordinary lengths to to make sure that I would find the gate standing open and unobstructed: by *His* death I am not only set free - having done *nothing* heroic myself, but offered something even better than a medal - a crown(!) says Saint John in *Revelation*: [3:11] A crown and *eternal* life - eternal life in a 'sanctuary' 'not...made by human hands'. [Heb. 9:24]

Just *dwell*, for a moment, on that word: '*sanctuary*'.

What does that bring to mind?

Security.

Serenity.

And I can have these things *permanently*, and only because God has decided (of His own accord) to offer me them?

Yes!

And this knowledge, if we *really* believe it, changes us. - that one day I could 'be like the angels in Heaven'? [Mk. 12:25]

This changes how we are with our money, our time and our things.

After all, life *is* short, so why not take some risks - not risks of self-betterment or indulgence, but courageous risks of *gratitude*, like the 'poor widow' - knowing that the prize outstrips value or treasure.

It is measureless.

So let us be "*eager*" for it. [ref. Heb. 9:28]

Let's take a moment to reflect.

Footnotes:

1. Schnabel, Eckhard J. (2017), *Mark (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Volume 2)*, Downers Grove, I. L.: InterVarsity Press, 259.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Thistlethwaite, Susan Brooks (2010), *Dreaming of Eden: American Religion and Politics in a Wired World*, New York, N. Y.: Springer, 78.
4. Cohen, Daniel M. (2015), *Single Handed: The Inspiring True Story of Tibor "Teddy" Rubin--Holocaust Survivor, Korean War Hero, and Medal of Honor Recipient*, New York, N. Y.: Penguin Random House, 2.
5. 'Veteran Gets US Army Medal of Honor 55 Years Later' (23rd of September, 2005), *Fox News*, available at <https://www.foxnews.com/story/veteran-gets-us-army-medal-of-honor-55-years-later> (accessed November 6, 2018).