



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Pentecost 25, Proper 27 – Year B
November 11, 2018

(RCL) Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17; Psalm 127; Hebrews 9:24-28; Mark 12:38-44

Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17

Naomi's and Ruth's family is on the brink of extinction. Both are widows, both destitute, and Ruth is a Moabite, a non-Israelite, an outsider. Naomi, too old to remarry and have children, sends Ruth to see Boaz, an extended family member, in the hope that Boaz will marry her and take them into his household. He does, and becomes the kinsmen-redeemer, and Ruth becomes King David's great-grandmother.

A significant theme in the book of Ruth is that of outsiders being let in. The loving-kindness of Boaz for those whom he could easily have dismissed (Ruth was more closely related to another man in the community who wouldn't take her in) is in keeping with Yahweh's constant refrain throughout the Old Testament on the care for foreigners and the impoverished.

- Who in your life could use some purposeful loving-kindness?
- Who knows what that person, perhaps on the fringes of your social circles or family, could do for the kingdom of God, if you would but invite them in...

Psalm 127

Holy Scripture has a pretty radical view of our world's dependence on God: if master builder and watchmen don't have God's assistance, their labor is a waste of time. Like the reading from Ruth, the Psalm echoes the theme of the Lord's care and provision for God's people. This Psalm in particular focuses on *children*, as the "Lord's heritage," as gifts of God: the means to sustain our very species is itself totally dependent on the Lord's making prosper the fruit of the womb.

Our society at large does not have this view of children. What the Psalmist calls "gifts," "happiness," and a "heritage," our society often calls "inconveniences," "unnecessary expenses," or an "obstacle" to your career. Even the most devout Christians fall into this type of thinking from time to time. If we're honest, those thoughts cross our minds more than we'd like to admit.

Eventually we must come to a conscious choice:

- Where will we be taking our cues from when it comes to how we think about children?
- From the script of that new sitcom, or from our holiest text?
- From the pulpit of pop culture, or from the mouth of God himself?

Hebrews 9:24-28

We can't pretend that these ancient ideas about how to cleanse a community of the guilt of their wrongdoings are natural for moderns like us to comprehend, but we must try, if Jesus' sacrifice is going to make any sense to us. Pardon the analogy, but if sin is pollution, then blood is a successful "clean up our streets" initiative. If sin makes us dirty, blood makes us clean. But whose blood, and what kind? That from a pure victim, offered to God by a priest. Like the high priests of old, Jesus appears before God in the most holy place, presenting not the blood of an animal, but *his own blood*, that which was spilt on the strangest of altars, the altar of a Roman cross. Paradoxically, He is at once priest *and* sacrificial victim, making a "perfect offering and sacrifice unto God."

Jesus' blood is re-presented to us when we receive the Eucharist, our principal act of worship where we proclaim our Lord's death until he comes again. This is not easy to grasp, in fact, it is "foolishness to those who are perishing," but it is inestimably worthy of your meditation and devotion. Christian, behold the Lamb of God. Behold him who takes away the sins of the world.

- How do you see this sacrificial act?
- How does that inform your view of the Eucharist?

Mark 12:38-44

Aquinas' *Catena Aurea* quotes Bede as saying that the allegorical meaning of the passage is that the "the poor widow is the simplicity of the Church: poor indeed, because she has cast away the spirit of pride and of the desires of worldly things; and a widow, because Jesus her husband has suffered death for her. She casts two mites into the treasury, because she brings the love of God and of her neighbor, or the gifts of faith and prayer; which are looked upon as mites in their own insignificance, but measured by the merit of a devout intention...she understands that even her very living is not of her own worthiness, but of Divine grace."

More obviously, the literal sense contrasts the religious elite, who are corrupt and hypocritical and donate their money for the spectacle, with the humility of the widow who gave nearly nothing, and yet everything.

- Since the Holy Scriptures are written for the Church, of which we are a part, what does Jesus' praise of this woman inspire in us?
- How can we imitate her humility?
- What can we give to God, even out of our poverty?

This Bible study, written by the Rev. Ryan Pollock, originally ran November 8, 2015.