Readings: Ruth 3:1-5 & 4:13-17

Psalm 127

Mark 12:41-44

Ruth 3Naomi 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. 2Now here is our kinsman Boaz, with whose young women you have been working. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. 3Now 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. 4When 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.” 5She said to her, “All that you tell me I will do.”

Ruth 4:13So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son. 14Then 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! 15He 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.” 16Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. 17The women of the neighborhood 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.

**Psalm 127**

1Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain.

2It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives sleep to his beloved.

3Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward.

4Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one’s youth.

5Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them. He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

**Mark 12:38-44**

38As he taught, he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, 39and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! 40They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

41He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. 42A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny.43Then 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. 44For 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.”

We have today the example of 3 women of faith. Naomi, Ruth and an unnamed poor widow. In between we have a psalm which is honouring of work and family but also warns of the vanity of giving too much weight to either. We can ask ourselves, what do we worry about? What keeps us awake at night? For what do we get up early and go to bed late?

But as we start today another story of a widow – Sheryl Sandberg – some of you will know this story. Sheryl was in the upper leadership of the facebook company. She was happily married with 2 children. Her husband had his own career and was forging ahead with that. They were on holiday at a resort – with friends, no kids. They had been lazing by the pool through the day. Sheryl’s husband decided to go to the resort’s gym before dinner. When it came tiom e for dinner though he was did not arrive and so when they checked out the gym he was there – he had had a massive heart attack. There would have been nothing anyone could have done about it.

Following the funeral, Sheryl was thrown into a deep pit. The way she imagined life going had been ruined. During this time a friend commented to her something like: its “option B” for you now. Your “option A” has passed, what’s your “option B”. we all live in some way with option B. In all of our lives there are things which don’t go to plan, what will we make of our option B’s. That’s the name of her book – its good for people who have encountered trauma in their lives and also for those who care for others going through tough times.

Naomi, how many options were cut off for her – she must have gotten down to about option F! Her story begins with tragedy upon tragedy and it ends with the hope of a Messiah. Elimelech and his wife Naomi and their two sons leave Israel because there is a famine there and they move to Moab – Gentile country. They settle there, but Elimelech dies. Naomi stays on and her two sons marry Moabite women Orpah & Ruth. But that’s not the happy ending, then from bad to worse, both the sons die – no grandchildren for Naomi and no children for Orpah and Ruth. Naomi hears that there is again food in Israel and so, 10 years after leaving Israel, she prepares to leave and see out her days back home. She urges Orpah and Ruth to return to their families and seek their welfare there, but both are intent on staying with Naomi. Eventually Orpah agrees to return, but stubbornly Ruth clings on and we have some of the most beautiful words in all of scripture. One’s used occasionally in a wedding service.

6But Ruth said, “Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; Where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. 17Where you die, I will die— there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!” 18When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

So they return and Ruth’s way of providing for Naomi is by following the grain harvesters and gleaning the left-overs which the pickers had left behind. She became a scavenger. There was a law which said you cannot harvest a field twice, but have to leave the rest for the poor – and also one of the young barley pickers might take a shining to Ruth. Longer story short, Boaz a kinsman of Emelech’s welcomes Ruth when she is gleaning in his field.

Still, the problem remains – no husband for Ruth and no grandchildren for Naomi. She knows the truth of the psalm children are a gift from the lord they are a real blessing, but she doesn’t have that and so starvation is still a real possibility.

Boaz enters the scene. As a kinsman in Israel, their law’s way of providing for widows was for a kinsman to marry the widow and then – hopefully provide an heir so that they could be provided for in their old age.

It seems though as if there is a little bit of a love story going on here – do you sense romance? Boaz was an honourable man and so when he was made aware that Ruth was a relation he agreed to take her as his wife. As a successful, rich man owner of land, cropping with servants of his own, he was probably already married, but we’re more than a thousand years before monogamy took off. Still, it seems to read that Boaz took a shining for Ruth. Anyway a son is born. His name is Obeb, he is the father of Jesse and Jesse the father of David – Israel’s ultimate king. This makes Jesus by his father’s lineage, a great, great something, son of a gentile woman – Ruth.

Boaz as a kinsman – redeemer is seen as a type of Christ. He gave to Naomi and Ruth what they could never gain for themselves. He extended grace to them in a most practical way.

Through this we see Naomi as one who trust’s in the Lord to provide through the laws of the land which were given by God to the people for the safeguarding of the vulnerable. Yes she did manufacture or hasten the result, but it was all in the context of her faith in God. Ruth took on the faith of her mother in law and clung faithfully to her, acting as she was instructed.

The poor widow:

Jesus took a well-earned break from the crowds and constant questioning. He pauses opposite where the offerings are being made for the temple. He sees the rich come in and throw their money in. it was a large vase like object with an open mouth and so when money was thrown in it made a big clatter. Very impressive. We’re reminded for the Psalm – its all vain unless it’s the Lord’s.

The poor widow comes in and almost in shame sneaks up and places two tiny coins – they slip in without hardly making a sound. Jesus intuitively picks up on what has happened. The rich gave out of their excess, but the poor widow gave everything she had – not even MacDonald’s on the way home – She is the one who’s faith is highlighted. She is the Hero of the day.

In giving everything she had, she left herself empty handed and totally at God’s mercy.

From a book of resources: Mark the Illustrated Gospel pg 127 by Malcolm Gordon & Michelle Long. ‘We find Jesus celebrating the widow’s offering, not because it is the most valuable, but because it is the most costly. She gives everything she has, leaving her empty-handed. Perhaps the empty-handedness is part of what Jesus values the most? Then the widow has nothing remaining to give to God but herself, her very life, and energy and time. How often do we give things in the place of ourselves? In lieu of getting involved with our own time and talents, how often do we put money up instead?’

Armistice day - I wonder what those who died in the war would think of our life grabbing world rather than life sacrificing one.

In our anxiety riddled, stress laden, pressure driven world would the soldiers of world war one think – did we give our lives for this?

Naomi, Ruth, the poor Widow. All these are desperate stories, all in a sense had little or nothing in their hands. They highlight for us a trust in God which exists even when there is nothing left.

Prayer of response.

We bring you everything and we tip it out in front of you.

(New Prayers from the Iona Community (pgs 64-5).

Lord God,

WE bring you our happiness and our weariness

Our disappointments ad our hopes,

Our needs, worldly and spiritual.

Our friends and those we find ourselves at odds with,

Our families and all the strangers we pass, day in, day out,

And the billions we will neither know nor pass,

The places that we most love,

And the places that disturb us most profoundly,

Our memories and our visions of the future,

Our highest successes and our most miserable failures,

The help we offer and the help we need.

We bring you everything,

and tip it out in front of you.

And now, we pause (for) a while in silence,

waiting for you to show us what we need to understand…

Lord God light up the things we need to see,

Brush to one side the things we need to put out of our minds,

Show us the doors we need to open

And the paths we need to take,

And be beside us as we go

So that the work we do is your work,

And the roads are your roads,

Leading to your presence

We ask in the name of your son,

and our brother

Jesus Christ

Amen.