

Journeying through the Revised Common Lectionary
Readings, Commentary, and Discussion Questions for November 11, 2018
Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost Proper 27



THE READINGS

First Reading: Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17 *Alternate 1 Kings 17:8-16*

^{3:1} Naomi her mother-in-law said to her [Ruth], “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.”

^{4:13} 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 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.

Worth Noting: The story of Ruth and Boaz evokes memories of the stories of Lot and his daughters, and Tamar and Judah (Genesis 19:30-38; 38). In all three, women take the initiative to preserve the ancestral line and progress salvation history. How have women helped you progress to your potential?

Psalm 127 *Alternate Psalm 146*

¹ Unless the LORD builds the house,
those who build it labor in vain.
Unless the LORD guards the city,

the guard keeps watch in vain.

² It 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.

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

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

⁵ Happy 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.

Worth Noting: Psalm 127:5 claims that a male without sons and no prospects for continuing or founding a house, has lost his honor and incurs shame. Is sexual prowess and fecundity still a matter of male pride? Has it contributed to the history of abuse by men of women and men?

Second Reading: Hebrews 9:24-28

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 judgment, 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.

Worth Noting: The once-for-all sacrifice of Christ means that the effects of Christ's sacrifice suffice for all time. Does it also mean that Christ's sacrifice also suffices for all people, regardless of their religion? Then is it necessary to be Christian?

Gospel: Mark 12:38-44

³⁸ As he [Jesus] taught, he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, ³⁹ and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor 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."

Worth Noting: Is this story meant to be ironic? Could Jesus really praise a woman who put her last

coins in the treasury immediately after warning of scribes who “devour widows’ houses”?

CONNECTING WITH THE SCRIPTURES

Entering into the Scripture

Moab, the native home of Ruth, lay immediately east of the southern two-thirds of the Dead Sea. At its largest, Moab measured about fifty-five miles by twenty miles, a bit smaller than the state of Rhode Island. From the Dead Sea on the west the land rises to 4500 feet.

The Moabites and their neighbors (Hebrews, Ammonites, and Edomites) shared much in material culture and language but maintained separate political, economic, and religious identities. As a consequence, the Bible records a long history of both interaction and hostility between the Israelites and the Moabites.



Genesis claims Lot, Abraham’s nephew, to be their ancestor (Genesis 19:37). Numbers reports that once the oracles of Balaam had assured the people of their safety on Moab’s borders, the Israelites had relations with the women of Moab and offered sacrifice to their gods (much to the LORD’s frustration and anger: Numbers 25:1-4). Later, Solomon took Moabite women into his harem and built a temple to their chief deity, Chemosh (1 Kings 11:1,7). The fact that the book of Ruth opens with Elimelech, Naomi, Mahlon, and Chilion emigrating from Bethlehem (“House of Bread”) to Moab (Ruth 1:1) suggests that such interaction – even migration – was not entirely implausible.

On the other hand, Moab was viewed as a perennial enemy (Judges 3:12-20). The prophets uttered oracles of destruction against her (one example, Jeremiah 48). Once in Bethlehem, Ruth herself is almost invariably referred to as “Ruth the Moabite,” suggesting that her former place of residence continued to define her as not quite wholly an Israelite.

The Torah excludes any with Moabite ancestors going back ten generations from the assembly of God: “No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD” (Deuteronomy 23:3). This is interesting because King David is the great-grandson of Ruth, the Moabite. (Ruth 4:17). Whether the book of Ruth was written and preserved to combat just such xenophobia is one debate topic for long winter nights among Bible scholars.

11:00 AM, November 11, 1918

This Sunday, the world observes the centennial of the end of the First World War, after 37 million casualties, the current population of California. While horrendous, the number pales in contrast to the 50 to 80 million casualties of World War II. These wars began in Europe among neighbors who, like Israel and Moab, shared much cultural heritage but who, also like Israel and Moab, could not find a path of peace.

“Globalization,” the integration of national economies and elimination of borders between countries, has become a dirty word in the western world. Bucking that trend, the

Nobel Peace Prize committee unanimously awarded the 2012 prize to the European Union, noting that the integration of European economies led to the longest period of peace in Europe since at least 1800 (think Wellington and Napoleon to Hitler and Churchill and now Macron and Merkle).

In reflections on the current political climate, it might be noted that Naomi and her family, economic refugees all, benefited from open borders, fleeing from famine in Judea to survival in Moab and back. The history that forms Israel's identity understands Ruth as the ancestor of Israel's greatest king, David. The genes of Moab contributed to the deliverance of Israel from Goliath, its prosperity, and the production of its prayer book the Psalms of David. Open borders preserved Israel just as they spurred European prosperity three millennia later.

Questions for Discussion

If everyone is descended from East Africans, then essentially everyone is descended from immigrants. How far back can you trace the generations of journeys that brought you to your current home?

Hebrews spends a great deal of time promoting the notion that Christ died in order to remove sin from humanity (Hebrews 8:26). That may not be the only reason for the incarnation, nor its only effect. Why else would Christ become incarnate? What other effects may there be?

It's the season for congregations to prepare 2019 budgets and for pulpit talks on stewardship. Some speakers may turn to the Gospel reading, holding up the widow as an example of a sacrificial giver. Given the context, the juxtaposition of the teaching on house-devouring scribes with the tale of the widow's mite, could this be a misrepresentation of Mark's point?



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