

All That We Are

November 15, 2009

Richmond United Church

Twenty-Third Sunday After Pentecost 2009

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

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#)

Mark 12:38-44

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#)

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The Rev. Dr. George Hermanson

Next week I have organized an event on Transforming Theology for Church and Society. In reading the material, clearly we must as a church develop a faith that address our world of "I am spiritual but not religious." We are moving into is the age of Spirit where there is "no standardized theology, no single pattern of governance, no uniform liturgy, and no common accepted Scripture." It is a time where all our faith statements are our best approximation, based on reason, a critical reading of the bible, and reconstructing our theology. This is a time of both excitement and chaos, of energy and closing down, of jumping into the future or seeking of comfort zones of the past. It is a time to take courage, to be bold in our faith, to claim new understandings of God that will guide us into the unknown future. Research indicates a healthy congregation includes study and worship life. It was found that a deep spirituality and open hospitality were the values that grounded them. This deep spirituality and hospitality was nurtured by the ministers, and lived by the people of the church.

The church that thrives builds on our tradition of being an open and inclusive church, with a variety of opinions and lack of orthodoxy as our defining identity. This is a struggle, for many want to set limits. What defines healthy churches is their sense and practice of hospitality. What was clear is that if we wish to grow we need to work on a spirituality that reflects the character of God. This character is one of Grace - to welcome in those at the edge. This character is one of compassionate / justice, that is to care for all, including our natural world so that all are included in our abundance.

This week we have some marvellous texts that pick up this theme of hospitality and compassionate justice. They are about giving all that we are and have. They are about the meaning of sacrifice.

To get this we have to first begin negatively - what sacrifice is not. It is not an offering to appease some negative force that demands blood sacrifice or we are not saved. God's grace is free and offered to all and we do not need to earn it.

Sacrifice is not for our own sake. Listen to the phrase "look at what I have sacrificed for you." The phrase tells us it was not a real sacrifice, it was to own the other, to create a debt to be repaid.

Sacrifice is done out of freedom for the sake of the other or the greater good. We do it for transformation. It is done out freedom, out of a desire to make this world a better place, thus I place myself in danger for the sake of others. Sacrifice does not seek reward. It seeks to help the kingdom of God be a reality on earth as it is in heaven.

Next week is Remembrance Day. There we remembered those who died for us. In their freedom they went off to maintain freedom. It was not out of the blood or battle that the transformation came, but out their sacrifice we learned what was important-freedom for all. Sacrifice does not demand death, though death may come when we face the evils of the world. Death does not redeem the world, for God has redeemed the earth.

So turning to Ruth. You need to know that the social safety net was the care of widows and orphans. Sons had to take care of the widow - no ifs or buts. Now if you had no son then the family of your husband had to take you into their blanket protection.

For compassionate / justice to happen Ruth has to go Boas and has sex with him - she claims the blanket protection that had not been offered. She risks all through how she claimed protection. She risks all for the sake of her mother-in-law. There is more. Ruth is of another tribe and nationality and under the law was an outcast. Here is a story of inclusion, of hospitality to the stranger as well as to the widow. The story changes the understanding of Israel's narrative. Now its role is to redeem the stranger. As well, Ruth is the grandmother of David. Out of that which was foreign comes the great hero David. That transforms the meaning of being chosen. Her sacrifice creates a new religious understanding where hospitality includes all of creation in God's blanket protection.

Ruth offered herself - all that she had because she had experienced the hospitality of God.

Turning to Mark, clearly those at the edge of society are the ones Jesus has compassion. Scribes are those in his society that are hired for their skills. They have taken too much pride in themselves. This is shown by how they treat the poor. They are learned so they know the tradition and the torah. So it should be a no brainer for them - they have read Ruth - Torah is the care of those at the edge of society. Hence the judgment. It is a self judgement which we have experienced when we say: "we know better."

To help us "know better" we have the story of the widow who gives all. It is the metaphor of one who has prayed "just as I am." She knows the blanket protection of God. She says, "here I am, all of me." Nothing is held back. Out of her fullness she gives her abundance and that is compared to "out of their surplus."

This is a spiritual problem. It is a decision to give all of oneself to God - to know what is most important is our God relationship. That demands sacrifice - a giving up and over to the lure of God. When that happens then our hospitality is expanded. There is no us and them. All are in God's protective blanket.

The widow offered herself - all that she had because she had experienced the hospitality of God.

What I know is that when a congregation shows hospitality it becomes a force for renewal. When we are welcoming of those different from ourselves we transform reality. When we practice spiritual disciplines, worship deeply, then our horizon is broadened and expanded.

God has judged all as worthy. God is a God of abundance - more than enough. When pray deeply we are filled so we can live the abundant life where we can, offering all of who we are for the kingdom's sake. When we explore our faith deeply we invite others to this expansive and expanding journey of transformation - of ourselves, others and the world.

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