

**Proper 27, Year B, RCL**  
**Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17; Psalm 127; Hebrews 9:24-28; Mark 12:38-44**  
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**November 8, 2015**

*Open our eyes to what we need to see. Open our ears to what we need to hear. Open our minds to what we need to know. Open our hearts to what we need to bear. Open our hands to what we need to give. Open our lives to justice and love. ~ Ruth Burgess*

There once was “a monk in the old days, a very holy man, who was sent to take up office as abbot in a monastery. He looked so humble a person that, when he arrived, he was sent to work in the kitchen as a scullion, with no attempt to take his position, he went and washed the dishes and did the most menial tasks. It was only when the bishop arrived a considerable time later that the mistake was discovered and the humble monk took up his true position” (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, 1977, p. 301).

What would you have done in the monk’s situation? Would you have told them who you were? There would be no shame in doing so. Or maybe you think it was good for him to get in at the bottom incognito to see how the monastery was really being run? That makes sense, too. I think it would be difficult to imagine being hired for a new job that has a very specific skill set and then being told you needed to address and mail envelopes all day in the basement. It questions our identity—who are we if we are not doing what we are meant to do? What does it mean to have a level playing field?

In our celebrity society where the ideal is that anyone can become rich and famous based on how many YouTube or Twitter followers you have or how often you are in the public eye—for better and often for worse—it is sometimes difficult to discern who we truly are and what we are living for. We crave connection with others—we’re hard-wired that way. As Christians, we are called in our Baptismal Covenant to “respect the dignity of every human being” and yet sometimes we find ourselves like the scribes Jesus talks about. We want respect at the cost of another’s.

Alfred Adler was an influential psychoanalyst who was a contemporary of Sigmund Freud. Adler developed a holistic process of therapy that he called Individual Psychology. One idea that Adler has was the understanding that there is a vertical and a horizontal way of living. Has anyone ever read *Hope for the Flowers*? Think about the pillars of caterpillars. The best way to describe this vertical axis is that it is climbing a ladder. If someone is below you, you just step on them and continue on to your goal of superiority. We all can start climbing that ladder when we’re tired, stressed, and hungry. None of us are immune. The problem happens when we stay on it—and some definitely do. Adler believed that social interest was the only way to stay mentally stable. When people are living on the horizontal axis—holding hands, reaching out to help each other—every person gets to be their best selves and the world is a better place.

Our Gospel story illustrates this concept today with Jesus observing the widow putting her money into the treasury. Oftentimes we automatically believe that Jesus is drawing attention to the widow to praise how she is giving her life’s savings to the Temple, but if we look more closely that is not what he is doing at all. There’s not one word of praise. Instead, Jesus is lamenting to the disciples the circumstances that demand her to

make her offering—which will most likely lead to destitution and death. After all, widows in that society had nothing and were nothing. They were completely dependent on the wider community for their food and shelter. What Jesus is drawing attention to is the Temple system that not only allows, but encourages this woman to give her whole life. And for what? We don't get the answer here, but in next week's lectionary Jesus tells the disciples that the Temple is going to be destroyed! This woman gave everything to a building that is not going to exist soon. She is giving everything to a system that is corrupt and where the scribes are "devouring widows' houses"—ruining her own well-being.

What is the reason that someone who has nothing feels compelled to give from that lack to the Temple? Who seeks to benefit from the exchange? Certainly not the widow. Remember those scribes Jesus warns us about? Yeah, they do. So where is God's Good News here?

The Good News is that this passage says something about the God we worship, revealed in Jesus, today. Our God is a God that sees a poor, marginalized widow woman and cares about her plight. Jesus sees the sacrifice she makes as all the other people are passing her by in the busy Temple. He draws attention to it and condemns those who have ordered their society to make such sacrifices necessary. God sees and laments. God sees and invites the disciples to see. God sees and opens our eyes, too. God sees us in our struggles and our cares, but God also believes in us enough to make a difference in others' struggles and cares—small and large.

And the parts that we can't fix? The disciples cannot stop the Temple from being destroyed, but they can continue to spread the Kingdom of God. They can share the Good News. They can rely on God for the rest. And so can we.

This is discipleship.

We go where God goes. Like Ruth went with Naomi in our Old Testament reading today. Ruth's loyalty to Naomi is without comparison, except for God's loyalty to us. As disciples we are called to move to strange lands and use our ingenuity to make God's love known.

My invitation to you this week in your faith journey is to really see another person. Has anyone heard of the group Liberators International? They are a group that did the World's Biggest Eye Contact Experiment and believe that we will achieve peace through human connection. They set up stations all across the world asking the question, "Where has the human connection gone?" and had strangers sit with each other for one minute and look into each other's eyes. The results are astounding (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3QdnCRWATZ8>). Some people can't help but smile or laugh, others cry, there were a lot of hugs, and all come away changed. You can look up the video on YouTube and be inspired.

I invite you to join me in doing this with one person this week. Ask them to gaze with you for one minute. Allow Jesus to do the gazing—how do you see the Christ in another? The answer may surprise you. Then I want you to ask an open-ended question that invites conversation: What do you need right now? or How can I be helpful to you? Join God's efforts that are already at work in the world through that one connection and see what happens.

May we be faithful, may we be humble, may we reach for each other, and may we truly see that the Kingdom of God is in our hands. AMEN.