

Twenty Fifth Sunday after Pentecost—Proper 27—Year B
Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17
Psalm 127
Hebrews 9:24-28
Mark 12:38-44

I woke up **Wednesday morning** relieved. The election was *finally* over. And, as I preached last Sunday, the results left us just as divided as a country on **Wednesday** as before ballots were cast. “*But at least it’s over,*” I thought, “*Maybe we can catch a breath.*” By **Wednesday afternoon**, *contentious news conferences* were occurring. By **Thursday morning**, *another mass shooting*—twelve dead, this time in **Southern California** at the **Borderline Bar and Grill**; it was *College Country Night*. By **Friday**, *wildfires raging throughout California*—twenty five dead to date.

No, there is no rest for our broken and weary hearts. And so, the **Collect** for today calls us to a deeper place, calls us to remember that “**God’s blessed Son came into the world that he might destroy the works of the devil and make us children of God and heirs of eternal life.**” *Think about that. Jesus came into the world to break the power, to destroy the works of all those forces that would seek to throw us apart; Jesus came to break the hold on all this division, and make us children of God, human beings related in one family, all of us heirs to eternal life; our inheritance is life and wholeness, fullness of life, life that transcends the realms. And this includes all of creation—that great cosmic hymn from Colossians—in Christ, all things were created, visible and invisible...all things have been created through him and for him...in him all things hold together...and through him, God is reconciling everything. Jesus came to knit us back together forever.*

The **Collect** continues, “**Grant that, having this hope, we may purify ourselves as he is pure.**” “*Grant that having this hope, we may gain the kind of clarity and transparency and authenticity and purpose and focus and presence that Jesus has in his being.*” “**Having this hope**”—those are powerful words, a **powerful antidote to the despair** that can swamp us and sink us amidst such brokenness as we are experiencing in this moment in the life of the world.

I keep wondering, amidst so much that needs to be set right, amidst so much work that we need to do to walk in the ways of justice and mercy and to live lives of righteousness and compassion, amidst all of this that is so heavy, **how do we drink from the well of hope? How do we take the time and stoke the capacity to taste joy and drink in peace? How do we practice gratitude and laughter**—both good medicine for the soul? *These were the questions I was hoping to turn to today* in the lull after such a bruising and prolonged election fight, **but the brokenness just didn’t stop**, and then I realized, *at an even deeper level, these* are absolutely the questions we need to be tending because the world is always crucifying love; we are always dying and always rising. Any sense that we will get to this space of perfectly still water is an illusion.

So, given that fact that **we are always taking up some cross**, either **willingly** or **when life simply places us there**, *what does it mean to have a holy hope? How do we cultivate a deep trust in God and in the universe God created?*

Naomi needed hope, for her Moabite daughter-in-law Ruth, and for herself. Naomi was a widow; so was Ruth, and I tell you, there was no one more *vulnerable* in ancient patriarchal Israel than a widow. She wants to set Ruth up with her kinsman Boaz—he would be the redeemer.

Redeemer—what a *weird word* to use in this context, but this was a *technical word* in that day and time. A redeemer was a close family member who would take on the responsibility of a widow, making her his wife, so that she would indeed know security. Naomi thinks her kinsman Boaz can do this for Ruth. Boaz is willing, but he knows there is another kinsman who is closer and really should perform this duty. But Boaz makes clear to Ruth that if this kinsman won't perform this duty, he, Boaz, will.

The other kinsman is willing, *until* Boaz makes known that Ruth is a Moabite. That was a deal breaker—Moabites were sworn enemies of Israel.

Boaz returns to Ruth and makes her his wife; they come together; the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son. The neighbor women named the boy Obed. Obed was the father of Jesse. Jesse was the father of David. David, the great king David, David's great grandmother was a Moabite woman. *Knit into David's DNA was the enemy. As Sister Sledge sang so well, "We are family." Part of having a holy hope is remembering that the enemy is always woven into our DNA. We are part of the human family; we share a common humanity.* Trying to cast one another out won't erase this fundamental fact that we belong to one another. And, in fact, *our security actually depends on cementing these relationships*, not running away from them.

The gospel story takes us into the deep waters of hope and trust, as well.

Jesus begins by cautioning us about *the trappings*. As 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, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

"Beware of those who are puffed up by their position, who cling to their status, who are fixated on how far they have risen, and who see themselves as apart from and above others.

Beware of those who seek the seats of honor, who see themselves as separate, who believe that the widows' (read most vulnerable) houses are theirs for the taking; who strip others of their homes; who consume the resources of the vulnerable for their own aggrandizement.

Beware of those who love to look good and say the right words, who can pray with the best of them, but who fill the space with so many words that God can't get a word in edgewise. Beware of those who don't have the capacity to fall silent before God, who can't risk letting God have a word with them that would convict their hearts."

That's a lot to beware of and be aware of!

Then, [Jesus] sat down opposite the treasury, and he watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Jesus was a keen observer of what people *did* with their lives—this was maybe even more important than what they *said*. Remember when he said in the **Sermon on the Mount** in **Matthew 7**: “Not everyone who *says* to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who *does* the will of my Father in heaven.”

[Jesus] watched many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. So get this, the two small copper coins were two **lepta**, *the smallest Greek coin*. These two **lepta** added up to **one kodrantes**, *the smallest Roman coin*, and this equaled 1/64 of a single day’s pay. And this was everything this widow had. Did you catch that? 1/64 of a single days’ pay was *everything* that widow had.

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. 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*.”

It was no skin of the back of the rich people to put in large sums, even extravagant sums, because *they had more than they needed*, they had an *abundance*, this giving didn’t demand anything of them. But the widow, she had nothing to begin with, *not anywhere close to a single day’s pay*, and she put in *everything* she had; she put in *all the resources* she had to live on.

Oh, there is a piece of us that wants to stop that widow, that wants to say, “No, don’t do it! Don’t put in everything you’ve got.” But honestly, *she can’t live on 1/64 of a daily wage; you can’t live on what she had*. Her tank was pretty empty, and she did the only thing she could do, she made that last act of complete surrender and said, “*All that I am and all that I have, it’s yours God. It’s yours. I’m yours. I am completely and utterly yours, and I trust myself, my life to you.*”

That is a holy hope that most of us can’t conceive of having. *Her surrender was material*, but what’s key here is **the act of surrender itself**. The rich, they have all these layers of insulation that *keep them from knowing their need, that keep them from knowing their poverty, and that keep them from making such a complete and total surrender*. Surrender, for them, feels like *losing*, feels like *failure*, and *that* feels like *death*.

JESUS SEES SOMETHING DIFFERENT IN THE WIDOW’S SACRIFICIAL ACT—FOR HIM, SURRENDER LOOKS LIKE FREEDOM. SURRENDER LOOKS LIKE THE NECESSARY LETTING GO THAT PRECEDES RESURRECTION.

It is knowing that your tank is running on empty and laying yourself and your weary, broken heart out before God. It is giving your sorrows and longings and wounds and dreams, it is bringing all of these before God and placing your bruised and battered heart in God’s hands, trusting that God will supply your deepest hunger, your utter thirst, your aching need that you can’t even put into words.

When life is cruising along fine, it's **easy to give lip service to God**, but honestly, *we're running the show, and doing a dandy job, thank you very much*. It's **going great, until it doesn't**.

Something comes along that takes you to your knees—an economic setback, a relationship that falls apart, a layoff, a diagnosis, suffering in a family member, a death, a fire that takes everything, *an act of incomprehensible violence*—something *rips your illusion of security away*, and *you are left face-to-face with your poverty*.

What's your next move?

Is it to **give into despair**, OR is it to **make an offering of your poverty and lay it on the altar for God to consecrate it and breathe life back into you**. *You won't be the same on the other side; your scars will remain, but you'll be free in a way that the rich and well-insulated never will know*. You're **truly free** when you can **truly release all that you have, release whatever it is that you think you possess**; you are **truly free** when you can **let it go and let God make of it what God will**.

Holy hope is born in the letting go. We can't understand this with our heads, but this is one of those truths that you **only know in the living of it**, and that is a **painful, costly hero's journey, indeed**.

Holy hope won't be found on the escalator going up; but only discovered when you go to the depths. It's odd, but even in these **dark and murky places** where you can't see the next step in front of you, in these **places of absolute poverty**, *you really can discover joy and gratitude and freedom and grace and the peace that passes understanding*.

We need a **holy hope**. We need a **holy hope to remember our common humanity**. We need a **holy hope to remember our kinship to "the enemy"**. We need a **holy hope to remember the riches that come in surrendering**. We need a **holy hope to remember that we are never, ever alone, and that Jesus has promised to be with us to the end of the ages**. We need a **holy hope for the living of these days**.

And that holy hope is already stirring deep within us where the Spirit is *already* praying and interceding in sighs too deep for words. That holy hope knows that love is always being refined on the cross, stretching our hearts ever wider, stretching our capacity to love ever deeper. That holy hope is *fierce* and *won't let us go* until we can leave our graveclothes behind and find ourselves raised from the dead once again. *O Lord, grant that, in these days, we can have this hope that already has a hold of us*. Amen.

The Rev. Cynthia K. R. Banks
St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Boone, NC
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