Worship Resources for November 11th, 2012—Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Ruth 3:1-5, 4:13-17 or 1 Kings 17: 8-16; Psalm 127 or Psalm 146; Mark 12:38-44; Hebrews 9:24-28

We conclude our brief story of Ruth, her willingness to make a commitment to her mother-in-law, her mother-in-law’s homeland and her faith, even though she was an outsider. We read how by trusting her mother-in-law, she was able to obtain security and stability, blessings for both her and her mother-in-law. Ruth is a heroic figure: she steps out in courage to not only change her life but change her mother-in-law’s life. She trusts in Naomi, and she trusts that even in Naomi’s sorrow and sadness, it is better to be together than to go alone and be separated. In our journey of life, there are times when we may be bitter like Naomi, struggling in our faith, but we need to have the courage of Ruth, and remember that when we are on this journey together, we know God will be with us, no matter what we go through.

In our prophet’s thread through the second reading of the Hebrew Scriptures, we read the story of Elijah meeting with the Widow of Zarephath. This was someone who had lost all hope, and when Elijah asks her for something to eat, her response is there isn’t much left, and she and her son were going to eat the last of it and wait to die. But Elijah tells her to step out in faith: make some food for Elijah first and then make some for her and her son, and she would see that God would provide. She steps out to trust God by trusting Elijah, and the food did not run out. In trusting Elijah’s word, and clinging to hope, she and her son survive.

Psalm 127 is a song of blessing, reminding those that trust in God, God will continue to bless them. We are called not to trust in ourselves or in our own work, but to remember that all things come from God, and all things return to God. Our blessings are gifts from God; we did not earn them.

Psalm 146 was also a choice last week; a song reminding us to put our trust in God and in God’s faithfulness, not in earthly rulers. As the election season is finally over, we are reminded that we are citizens of another kingdom, participants in another reign, and that we put our trust and hope ultimately in God, and not the rulers in this world.

Mark 12:38-44 reminds us again, more subtly, of Mark’s theme of “the first shall be last and the last shall be first in the kingdom of God,” in Jesus denouncing the actions of the scribes. We know that not all the scribes were conceited, for just in the previous passage it was a scribe that asked Jesus the question about the greatest commandment and in Mark’s Gospel, the scribe is genuinely curious, not trying to outwardly test Jesus but rather he is moved by Jesus’ response. But in this passage, Jesus contrasts the actions of many of the scribes with the action of a poor widow. Many widows in Jesus’ day, if they had no sons and no living father, ended up on the streets. This widow is very poor, but gives all she has to the temple treasury. And while others have put in great amounts of money, Jesus makes the claim she has given more, because she has given out of what she had to live on. Jesus calls us to give our lives to God, not just our money, not just our prayers, not just our talents, but all of who we are. This poor widow demonstrates that kind of faith and devotion. It’s not about one act or a set of actions, but about who we are and how we live our lives for God.

Hebrews 9:24-28 reminds us that the fulfillment of Jesus’ life did not end at the cross, and was not over at Christ’s ascension, but that the fulfillment of Jesus’ role is the fulfillment of all time and creation, earth and heaven. Christ came to end sacrifice, to end the violent cycle of human life and death. Christ’s work is not finished, but as we prepare for Advent, we are reminded that we are a people of hope, waiting for Christ to enter our lives in a new way and to reveal more fully the life promised us.

All of these passages today remind us that we are called to step out in faith. This is not easy, but in order to see the greater picture, in order to understand more deeply the fullness of new life offered in Christ, we have to take the leap of faith and to trust God. Like Ruth, we have to step out into the unknown, and like Naomi, we may be bitter, we may want to reject God and go it alone, but we know that God remains faithful, even as Jesus was hung on the cross—so we, too, live for our resurrection moments, our moments of hope, and knowing that we need each other to share the hope, as Ruth did with Naomi.

As we recover from Sandy in the eastern United States, we need to remember to be Ruth for the Naomi’s, to bring hope, to live into God’s hope, to be living hope, giving our lives to Christ by serving the lost and the least.

Call to Worship (from Psalm 146)

Praise the Lord!

**Praise the Lord, O my soul!**

I will praise the Lord as long as I live!

**I will sing praises to my God all my life long!**

God gives justice to the oppressed,

**And God gives food to the hungry**

The Lord will reign forever!

**Praise the Lord!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Prayer of Confession

Holy God, we come to You as broken people. Our faith hangs in shambles as we see the destruction of Sandy on the east coast. We question why this storm happened in this way, we grieve the loss of life and land, and we look at our patterns of living and climate change. God, lift from us this burden, burdens of guilt and shame and hopelessness, and instill in us Your Spirit of hope. Call us to be living hope for the hopeless. Guide us to give our lives to You by living for others. Instill in us the knowledge that You have given us the ability to bless others, and call us to be a living blessing to others. In the name of Jesus the Christ, the Resurrection, the True Hope, and the Life, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. God will lift us up when we fall. God will renew our strength like the wings of eagles. God is calling us to be living hope. Go and live out God’s hope, knowing you are forgiven and have the gift of new life in Christ. Amen.

Prayer

God of Grace and God of Glory, we continue to pray in solidarity with our brothers and sisters who are grieving, who are rebuilding, who are coping in the aftermath of the great storm. We continue to seek Your guidance in ways we can best offer our help and support to those in need. We continue to see Your guidance in our own lives, in how we can help reduce our impact on the earth and reduce climate change. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage to live our lives for You, to live our lives to serve others, to live our lives with integrity and hope. In the name of Jesus the Christ our Savior, we pray. Amen.