

## **Two Bold Widows**

### **November 7, 2021**

Have you ever watched a TV show that required a recap at the start of each episode? Usually it's for dramas, shows that are very in-depth and involved, so you need to be reminded of what happened in the previous episodes. And even the recap is very dramatic, like the narrator is a news anchor giving a breaking report. "Previously, on Heartland!" Then you hear about the most recent crisis on the show or about some feud that's broken out between characters. And always the recap ends with a sudden fade to black.

Well, today, we actually hear part 2 of the story of Ruth. We were supposed to hear part 1 last week, but because it was All Saints' Eve, we instead heard special readings for that day. So if you'll indulge me for a few minutes, let me bring up you to speed. Previously in the book of Ruth:

There once was a woman named Naomi, who lived in Bethlehem with her husband and two sons. One day, famine struck, so the family moved far away to a foreign country to begin a new life. The family got settled in this foreign land and lived there for years and years, but then Naomi's husband died, unfortunately. The two sons grew up and got married, one to a woman named Orpah, and one to a woman named Ruth. But then 10 years after the weddings, tragedy struck again, and the two sons died, leaving Naomi to look after her two daughters-in-law.

Naomi decided to move back to Bethlehem, where she had relatives. She encouraged Orpah and Ruth to stay behind, since they had family nearby. Orpah stayed, but Ruth said, "No, where you go, I will go. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God." A bold choice, really.

So Naomi and Ruth went to live in Bethlehem. They went to the home of a wealthy, successful businessman named Boaz, who was one of Naomi's relatives. The two women worked in Boaz's fields with the other local women, and Boaz was kind to them and made sure they were safe and well fed. Over time, Boaz took a liking to this Ruth, this daughter-in-law of his relative.

And fade to black. That brings us to where our reading begins today. At this point, Ruth and Naomi are safe. They are cared for, in a world where widows were often mistreated, ignored, or taken advantage of, financially.

But Ruth didn't get to this place by being timid. Ruth is a bold woman. And she and Naomi hatch a plan to make their lives a bit better.

The plan, we hear, is for Ruth to go spy on Boaz and see where he sleeps. Then once he goes to bed, Ruth is to sneak down and lie at his feet, which is an act of devotion.

Ruth is risking a lot to do this. She is risking the security that Boaz has given her (because he might throw her out), and she's risking her reputation, her good name (imagine the scandal if people found out she slept in the men's sleeping quarters!) in order to show her devotion to

Boaz. She is nothing if not bold. The hope is that Boaz will see her act of devotion and be touched.

And it works. Boaz is smitten. He is impressed. He is grateful for the dedication Ruth has shown him. And eventually, he and Ruth get married. And we're told, they have a son together, and that son ends up being the grandfather of King David.

And I think it's only after we've heard this whole story that we start to understand: Ruth was playing the long game. It seems like Ruth wasn't content living as a poor widow, dependent on the charity of others. So she took matters into her own hands and secured her future in (granted) one of the few ways women could in those days, by marrying a successful man. But it worked. Through her wits, through her boldness, Ruth ends up as a successful woman and the grandmother of a king. Pretty shrewd.

If it weren't for Ruth's boldness, she might have stayed in her homeland and found a nice husband there. And she never would've met Boaz, and she never would've had Obed, the grandfather of David, the descendant in fact of Jesus himself. Maybe, if it weren't for Ruth's boldness, you and I might be sitting in a synagogue today because Jesus would never have been born. Thank goodness for Ruth's boldness.

But Ruth isn't the only bold widow we hear about today. In our Gospel lesson, Jesus observes a poor widow as she enters the Temple in Jerusalem. While wealthy visitors throw in huge amounts of money, this widow almost goes unnoticed as she gives two small coins to the treasury. But Jesus notices. And in so many words, Jesus says, "This woman is bold. Everyone else has a lot left over after they've made their donations, but this widow has given all that she had to live on," literally, "her whole life."

Now here at St. Gabe's, it's stewardship season. It's the time of year when we ask for donations. I have to admit, I'm tempted to say, "Be like that woman! Give all of your money to the church!" I'm not going to tell you NOT to, but I don't think that's necessarily the lesson that we should take away from this.

I think that sometimes God calls us to be bold. Bold in how we pray, in how we love, in how we give of ourselves, and yes, even how we use our money. Sure, there are times when we need to be cautious or careful; we don't need to be reckless. But boldness has long been a characteristic of the Christian faith. And boldness can be a virtue.

To give you an example, I'll share with you that sometimes when I pray, I hedge my bets. I ask God for something, and then, to avoid being disappointed, I end by sending... "if it is your will, God." Or I'll pray for not the best outcome, but an acceptable outcome. If someone is sick or struggling, I don't want to pray that the person will be healed, so I pray that the person might find healing, if only in their spirit. I don't know if anyone else does the same.

The problem in this, in hedging our bets, in being meek in our prayers, is that we aren't trusting that God can do incredible things. It can be good to say, "God, I know this is a big prayer, but

heal him.” And whether that will happen, who knows? But to be bold in prayer is to remind ourselves that God is awesome.

On top of that, I think prayer changes us. Thomas Aquinas, one of the greatest theologians in history, wrote in the 1200s about how we don’t pray to change God’s mind. But we pray because prayer has an effect on us, the ones praying. Prayer makes us more aware of the difficulties people face. Prayer brings us closer to God. And prayer draws us to help or to serve others. And so if we pray meekly, we act meekly. But if we pray with boldness, then we are fed spiritually to go out in the world and act boldly in service and love.

Pray with boldness. Speak with boldness. Love with boldness.

Because without boldness, we are lost. If Ruth hadn’t been bold, we wouldn’t be here today. If Jesus hadn’t been bold, he might have hidden away from his critics and avoided the cross altogether, and lived a long but unknown life. It can be an act of faith to be bold.

I’ll close with a quote from Mike Yaconelli, who was a theologian, a church leader, and a writer of satire. His words apply to Ruth, the widow who gave two pennies, and anyone who wants to live more boldly. He writes,

“Boldness doesn’t mean rude, obnoxious, loud, or disrespectful. Being bold is being firm, sure, confident, fearless, daring, strong, resilient, and not easily intimidated. It means you’re willing to go where you’ve never been, willing to try what you’ve never tried, and willing to trust what you’ve never trusted. Boldness is quiet, not noisy.”

Mike Yaconelli. “BrainyQuote.” Accessed Nov 6, 2021. [https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/mike\\_yaconelli\\_825315](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/mike_yaconelli_825315).

Amen.

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