

Sunday Thought

7th November 2021 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings

Ruth 3: 1 – 5: 4: 13 - 17

Psalm 127

Hebrews 9: 24 - 28

Mark 12: 38 - 44

Then Now and Forever

We often read the scriptures as stories and truth from the past. They mostly recur in some measure with every generation, and they are still with us in our present times. All today's readings give testimony to that. The romantic story of Ruth and Boaz reaches its climax like a contemporary drama and its



theme is recognisable in every generation. It is set amid issues of prejudice combining both class and racial differences, just like those in the news today. Racial bitterness and exploitation of women and children continue to abuse the dreams of the growing millions of refugees escaping brutal regimes. The story also has a background of weather changes and failed harvests, reminding us of present discussions about how to cope with climate change and our destruction of the natural world. The scale of these things can be frighteningly greater today, but they were still part of everyday life in Bible records. We take note of recent locust plagues in East Africa and recall the prophets Joel and Amos speaking of darkened skies as the locusts flew in to devour everything in their path. The first Christians in Antioch organized a relief fund for victims of famine in Judaea; the prophet Zechariah tells of fire burning down the cedar forests of Lebanon and the Apostle Paul recounts being in danger from floods during his travels. It could all be happening now. Our psalm gives us a different view of 'then and now' as it tells of people working all hours, earning fortunes to spend on their security, but leaving God out of all their work and their planning for their futures.

The gospel story brings us a familiar picture of hypocrisy among the rich and powerful who expect lesser folk to look up and respect their proud bearing and fine dress as they take best places at feasts and other celebrations while ignoring the basic needs of the poor. We have our own examples today.

Jesus was speaking of many of the religious leaders, and especially the teachers of the law who sat in the honoured front seats at their synagogue, but abused their position, using their expertise in law to deprive widows of their right to their husband's property. Mark links this with Jesus' observation of a poor widow making her Temple gift. While these important leaders were ostentatiously putting in their large amounts of spare coin, probably portioned out into each of the many Temple collection bowls, the poor widow quietly dropped in the smallest copper coins. Those coins represented 'all that she had to live on'. They would be a small fortune in comparison to the leftovers given by the rich.

The story reminds me of Lisa in the supermarket. She left the store with her trolley filled at the same time as her neighbour Jennie. Jennie was a grandmother struggling to help keep her son and his family who had fallen on hard times of poor health and sparse employment. Outside, their trolleys almost collided. Lisa's was full. Jennie had just a few basic items. They paused to speak briefly before Lisa took a loaf, a carton of milk and packet of cheese from her trolley and placed them in Jennie's who protested. She had barely got a word out before Lisa took the rest of Jennie's purchases and put them in her own trolley. Turning the handle of the full trolley towards her neighbour, Lisa said, *'You take that one love. I've all I need.'*

The other reading today is the most important to think about because it represents the 'Forever' part. The writer of Hebrews continues to describe Jesus as the High Priest who died on a Cross to show us God's gracious forgiveness towards all who are sorry about wrong they have done and trust him to share a changed, new life with them. That is a fact which is not lodged in the past or the present. It is always true! God's gracious and wonderful life is for all and for always. It was his gift then. It is his gift now. It is his gift for all who come to him, now, tomorrow and for ever!

A Prayer (with Psalm 127 in mind)

Lord, when I forget you and leave you out of my life
My plans become mere sketches on a page,
My ambitions fade like dreams at daybreak,
I become anxious for my safety,
My hard work and achievements amount to little.

You have promised to provide for those
who always have you in their heart and mind.
May I never forget to include you in every part of my daily life.

