

“Examples of Faith”
By Rev. Frances Savill
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Readings:

Mark 12:38-44

Ruth3:1-5, 4:13-17

If you looked at a church liturgical calendar you would see that November 1st was All Saints Day. For our tradition, it’s a day to consider all the saints of the church, those who have gone before us, those who sit beside us, those who have or do encourage our faith and help us to love God more.

If you’re like me, you have a long list of people who encourage your faith, teach you to live your faith better, who reveal God to you, and help you love God more.

If you don’t have a long list, speak to me after the service and I’ll introduce you to some people.

The Bible is filled with the stories of ordinary faithful people, living out ordinary faithful lives, but we find these are gospel lives, and the fruit of these lives is the stuff of the kingdom of God.

None of these folks are portrayed as perfect, but they are people who strive to love God and live that love.

Some of these saints are named, consider Ruth and Naomi, both widows, both poor, struggling to stay alive.

Ruth was a Moabite, which names her as an enemy of God's people, and yet she exhibits a rare faithfulness and love that sets her apart.

Ruth determined that she would stay with her mother-in-law Naomi to help her.

Ruth makes this beautiful covenant promise to Naomi *"I will go where you go. I will stay where you stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. ¹⁷ Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried."*

An ordinary woman, whose husband died, decided to be faithful to her mother-in-law. She decided to care for the older woman, when the odds would have been much better to go back to her own people.

Ruth worked hard, gleaned fields so that she and Naomi would have food.

She listened to her mother-in-law, when Naomi instructed her to go to Boaz.

And God blessed these women.

Our passage this morning speaks of Boaz, an ordinary man, doing the right thing redeeming the family land, marrying Ruth, and providing for both women.

Then there were those last couple of lines of scripture, a short genealogy ends the passage. Surprisingly though, we learn that Ruth and Boaz's son Obed, bore a son Jesse, who was the father of David, the greatest king of Israel.

God used Ruth, a young widow, of Moabite descent, and Boaz, a simple but good man, to be the great-grandparents of King David.

It's surprising who God can use.

Ruth is the stuff of the gospel, the kind of surprising, unexpected person, God uses.

Jesus held up the example of another widow, this one unnamed, for maybe she has a thousand names, as she lives out her trust in God.

Jesus highlights the widow's actions as a contrast to the greed and hypocrisy of some of the Scribes.

Note that Jesus had just had an encounter with another Scribe who answered Jesus wisely, and Jesus commended him as being not far from the kingdom of God.

So Jesus wasn't critical of all scribes.

But there continues to be religious leaders who devour widows' houses and make a show with lengthy prayers.

Over and against their poor example, Jesus saw a widow who put 2 small coins into the treasury.

Many people were giving large sums, why did she bother to give so little?

If she didn't have much why did she give at all?

Her gift seemed absurd.

Yet, she became the example of faithfulness, for her two small coins were all she had.

She gave everything to God.

She kept nothing back.

Others who gave much had more in reserve.

They gave of their abundance and they would lack for nothing after their gifts were given. But the widow gave all, held nothing back, and in giving her 2 coins cast herself unto the care of God.

This widow was the example of faithfulness and the stuff of the gospel message.

The size of her gift was not the point, but her love and trust of God set her apart from the others. Her life was gospel material.

In a church I served in, we had a building campaign.

Elders were asked to pledge money towards the building project to kick off the campaign.

One of the elders came to me uncertain about what he could pledge.

He was a small business owner, he tithed, but wasn't sure how much more he could give.

He was very supportive of the building campaign, but was afraid he could only give \$200-\$300 more above his \$1000.00.

He and his wife lived on \$10,000 a year.

I suspect that he gave more than all the rest of us, at least with how Jesus counts the offering.

Mark and I saw another building campaign in a different church, their slogan was; “unequal gift, equal sacrifice.”

How many of you would want to sacrifice equal to that elder?

Another church building project was happening in Ontario several years ago.

The building was going to cost 1.7 million.

The congregation pledged and came up short – they raised under a million.

One family prayed – and waited on God,

They decided that they would sell their cottage in the Muskoka’s and give the money to the building project so that the building could go forward.

God honoured their gift and their sacrifice – and God continues to bless that church.

That church went from a position of decline, seeing that their doors would close in ten years, to a place where they are overflowing with God’s blessings.

A grandson came to do his grandparents taxes.

The elderly couple was very active in their church.

They gave first to the church, supporting the general and missions funds, though they lived on small pensions.

Then they supported every other fundraiser of the church.

They baked for sales, knitted for children, and for church bazaars.

He donated his wood carvings, and she brought sandwiches and squares to every church luncheon, or funeral tea.

When their grandson reviewed their finances to prepare their tax return, he wondered how they survived, and he had no idea how they gave away so much.

Lives molded after the gospel.

Ordinary people, living ordinary lives, but making gospel decisions daily, humble sacrifices, that have unexpected results for the kingdom of God.

This is Remembrance Day Sunday, and today we remember ordinary lives, ordinary men and women who paid the ultimate price for the freedom we enjoy today.

Today we are reminded of stories like one that came out of Afghanistan in 2006.

A Taliban soldier was wounded and captured by Canadian soldiers.

The enemy soldier was treated in hospital the same as injured Canadian soldiers.

Canadian doctors saved his life.

The compassion he was shown led our enemy to change sides in the conflict.

Saints, hardly perfect, but trying to be faithful day by day, decision by decisions, following our Lord, is the stuff of the gospel.

Your stories are being recorded in Jesus' book of life right now.

You sit beside saints Sunday by Sunday.

Maybe you're one of them.

God uses the most unexpected people.

It's surprising who God uses as examples of faith.

I thank God for each one of you.

And if someone asks me for a list of saints who worship in this church, is it okay if I give them your name?

Thanks be to God!