

Good Morning

Today we hear a lot about women in our readings. Now that doesn't happen very often ~ it's challenging to find women heroes in the Bible~ it can be done, they are there, but I think it's safe to say that it's easier to find the men heroes.

Take for instance our reading today from the book of Ruth. The entire story is a story of women yet those who made the selections for the Revised Common Lectionary – which is our annual schedule of readings ~ choose to have Ruth read once this year, and we are given the part of the story where she offers herself to a man in the middle of the night and then we are pushed into the end of the story about the heroic Boaz who agrees to marry her. I gotta tell you that earlier this week a lightbulb went off in my head when I realized that there are many other elements of the story that they could have chose and I wondered why they didn't. Even in a book that is specifically about a woman the selected snippet makes it difficult to see her as a hero.

In the Book of Ruth we see three women, Naomi and her two daughter-in-laws who all become widows. In the culture of that time three widows in a foreign community were not safe, travelling back home to their kin communities was not safe. The safest thing for Ruth to do is somehow make it back to her home town. But instead she decides to stay with her mother-in-law, she offers her own security and her future to another woman who is not even related to her. When they return to Naomi's community Ruth does what Naomi tells her to do and she offers herself to Boaz as the only means of securing their future. And even that was risky – putting yourself at the bottom of a man's bed didn't always end in marriage, it could have just as easily ended up with Ruth being called a prostitute and thus ending their lives all together.

What we see in Ruth is a serious of sacrifices, risks and offerings that are unbelievably counter-cultural.

In our gospel reading today we see a story that has some similarities. Jesus says that there are Scribes who are 'devouring the houses of widows'. Now scribes would often be the business managers of women who had money but no man. Jesus points out that in his society widows are at risk of being taken advantage of. But yet, a widowed women, comes to the treasury and offers two copper pennies, money she probably desperately needed in a culture where she had very little opportunity to earn money or secure her future. The widow also shows us sacrifice, risk and offerings.

In 1906 women began to be admitted into the military. As nurses, they took care of the injured soldiers and dealt with the first hand horrors of war. Over 3100 heroic Canadian women showed us sacrifice, risk and self-offering; twenty-nine of them died during World War One.

In 1941 women not only volunteered for the Second World War but they fought to expand their role and become mechanics, parachute riggers, heavy mobile equipment

drivers. Many joined the battle and left the homes they knew to make sacrifices, risks and offered themselves for something they believed in. Five women died.

Between 1965 when women were made a permanent feature of the military through to 1988 when a Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ordered the Canadian Forces to achieve complete integration of women in the military, women from across our country joined with men to offer and sacrifice for our countries ongoing efforts for peace-keeping. In 2006 Capt. Nichola Goddard became the first female to die in front-line combat during the Afghanistan peace effort.

Throughout our military history we also see women, as mothers, who have supported their children... I imagine that these women often did not understand what drove their sons, and daughters, to join the military. And even if they did understand the bigger picture and supported them, at some point they were simply moms who would cry and pray and worry for the safety of their children. In my mind these mothers are no different than Mary who I'm sure at some point sat at the bottom of the cross frustrated, sad, and hurt that it had to be her son that was the saviour.

In all of these stories we see the same flow of events. We see cultures and society that create structures within which humanity works and we see women who become heroes despite the constraints of these social realities as they stand up for what they believe in.

I have to be completely honest with you, even though I have known for about three months that I was preaching today it was not until about three weeks ago that a colleague at school, a man who is studying to be a military Chaplain, pointed out to me that it was Remembrance Sunday. I do not have first-hand experience with a family member in the military, and if I was even more brutally honest with you I would tell you that even if I did the conversation of war and violence is not one I engage in... I admit that I am part of that first generation of women and men who are just that much more disassociated with the two world wars. In addition I feel strongly that as a Christian, I follow a Jesus who embodies peace and non-violence.

Yet at the same time I live in a culture that breaths violence. You only have to go to an Ottawa Senators game and see the excitement that happens when a fight breaks out to know that on some level we are advocates for violence. As you know our country's military has shifted into a role of peace keeper but even that doesn't make sense to me all the time because I'm not sure where the line is between peace keeping and violent combat in the battles that are being fought today.

But I do know that I want women in other parts of the world to have access to education and safety, I do know that I want mothers in other parts of the world not have their sons become suicide bombers, I do know that I want freedom and dignity for humanity. So the only thing I can do is trust that amidst the confusion of it all God is indeed working.

In the book of Ruth we see a woman who takes risks and sacrifices – I believe that at the time even she herself might have questioned what she was doing – but through those risks God works and Ruth and Boaz end up having children and beginning the line of David.

The widow thought she was just going about her business and probably didn't even notice that she became an example for Jesus that is still used to teach us today about what it means to be part of the kingdom of God.

God, in Gods mysterious ways, works through the good and the challenging parts of humanity ~ and works through the stuff that doesn't make sense. Even as we question the reasons and realities of violence and war our faith and our scriptures ask us to trust that God can even work through this.

So like Ruth, like the widow, like fallen soldiers such as Captain Nichola Goddard we are called to examine society and discern how we are going to make the world a better place, even if sometimes we are asked to go against cultural norms. And we are called to trust that God is working through every aspect of our lives and our societies.

So today, on Remembrance Sunday, for those women who have gone before us who both inspire us and demonstrate heroism; those who have risked, who have offered, and who have sacrificed ~ Lest we forget.

AMEN

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