### “Hope for Widows” Steve Finlan for The First Church, November 10, 2024

**Ruth 3:1–4; 4:13–17**

[Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth were both widows.] Naomi said to Ruth, “My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you. 2Now here is our kinsman Boaz. . . He is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing-floor. 3Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing-floor. . . 4When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do. . .”

13 So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son. 14Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin . . . Your daughter-in-law, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him.” 16Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. 17The neighborhood women gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David.

**Mark 12:41–44**

41 He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. 42A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. 43Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. 44For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

Naomi and her widowed daughter-in-law, Ruth, became the best of friends, especially after Ruth’s husband, Naomi’s son, died. Naomi then acted as a matchmaker for Ruth, as we see here. She chooses well, when she chooses Boaz, for he had proven himself to be just and compassionate, as described in the previous chapter of the Book of Ruth, where he insures that Ruth can glean grain in his fields, and he instructs the young men to not bother her or hinder her (2:9). That’s enough evidence for Naomi. She can’t imagine a better partner for Ruth, so she instructs Ruth to boldly go and lie down next to Boaz where he lives. To “uncover the feet” is a euphemism for uncovering the man’s privates.

Apparently things are quickly consummated, along with a marriage, and the next thing you know, she has borne a son. Despite Ruth’s ancestry as a Moabitess, she and her son are accepted as full members of the Israelite community, and we are informed that they are ancestral to David. Matthew places them in the ancestry of Joseph, Jesus’ father.

So, Ruth is a story not only of the joy and the parenting of two widows, but also tells of how a Moabitess marries into the Israelite line, leading even to the royal line of Judah and Israel. This story fits with some other biblical stories about barren women who prayed for sons, and who finally received sons in their old age, such as Hannah (1 Samuel 1:19–20) and Sarah (Gen 18:10; 21:2). These stories show that the God of Israel was known to have a special affection for childless but faithful women, and took pity on them. One can imagine that Jewish women told these stories to each other around the kitchens and dining rooms. Childbearing, especially son-bearing, was of incomparable importance to women in those days, and so their stories of hope often involve a woman bearing a son. The Bible often speaks of God meeting the needs of those who are considered low-ranking in society. Many who are last shall be first.

Jesus shows his own compassion for a widow in his highlighting the actions of a certain widow. He holds her up as an example for the apostles to respect, for “rich people put in large sums . . . contribut[ing] out of their abundance,” while she “put in everything she had” (Mark 12:41, 44). He holds her up for admiration. He doesn’t speak to her, but if he had we could imagine him saying something like “well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much” (Matt 25:21).

An apostle of Jesus is not to be snobbish about wealth or status in society, but is to be ready to admire a widow, a leper, a Samaritan, or whoever embodies the love and faithfulness that characterizes life in the kingdom. It is a whole different set of values, one that sees only spiritual qualities and loyalties, and not worldly reputation or money. Jesus often tries to redirect his apostles’ evaluations into more spiritual channels. They ought to clean the inside before the outside (Matt 23:26); they ought to seek for God’s will and God’s kingdom above all else (Matt 6:33); whoever wants to be first ought to be the servant of all (Mark 9:35). Jesus’ scale of values is often the reverse of what the world teaches.

Real hope for widows, for orphans, for the lonely or the downcast, the misfit or the nonconformist, is that there may be a scale of spiritual values. Only on that scale can someone’s true worth be appreciated. It’s true about all the people who are under-appreciated, mocked, or unfairly condemned. We need to be judged by a scale of spiritual values, and not by the world’s often bigoted judgmentalism.

We have phrases like “the good Samaritan,” but how often do we think of a minority or a foreigner being exemplary and good? One story comes to my mind. It’s when my car was stuck on an icy spot on the road in the Bronx, when I lived there. Another car stopped and three Middle-Eastern men got out and started pushing my car while I applied the accelerator. I was able to get it to go. I thanked them. They waved and got back in their car. There are good Samaritans everywhere.

Every one of us can became great. We needn’t stay in the misfit or loner category. Jesus’ compassion for widows is no different from his love and understanding of all people who are looked down upon or considered of little worth. He sees the worth in all of us. And he can transform each one of us into a dynamic personality.

There is no end to Jesus’ advocacy for us. He encourages us and empowers us. He sees the potential within us.