

The Road Home:

"Fearlessly Giving and Living!"

Ruth 1: 12-18; 2:1-4a, 7; 3:1-5; 4:13-17;

Mark 12: 38-44

November 11, 2018

You know, our future is *constantly* being shaped by a myriad of decisions we make every day.

Sometimes what appears as a small decision ends up having...eternal consequences.

I've been thinking about Ruth, one of only 5 women named in the genealogy laid out in Matthew at the beginning of his storytelling.... as part of Jesus' family tree. Her? Really!? Yes!!

Ruth, who makes a decision not based on personal security or cultural expectations, but rather on **relational love for someone...Naomi** who can offer no assurances or prosperity or other worldly benefit. Think about that....

And Naomi...as she gives Ruth permission to move on... (Do we give others permission to move on?) ...she chooses to stay. To hold the cards dealt her rather than fold them!

Ruth decides to be in relationship with Naomi against all odds. Why?

Ruth risks leaving what is familiar,

risks engaging with people and promises in the foreign land in which she finds herself...

gleaning from its abundance with seemingly little power or say to affect her situation. Why does she do it?

Seems to me....
she values and deeply understands what it means to be in meaning centered, committed relationship,

able to forego the immediate, staying alongside for the long run, doing what is 'right' for herself despite what others may say or be doing. (Are you hearing this?)

Ruth gets it: Right relationship is the key to life.
And like last week's teaching, it begins with herself
so she can love others as herself...and so love God.

No seeming reward for her choosing.... yet, she chooses wisely...devoting herself to the relationship she does have and a person she does truly love.

And she finds she is blessed with more relationship (not less) and becomes the foremother of the one we call Messiah...
the Life bringer, the Life redeemer, Abundance Incarnate.

Her story is a vision of how to do holy, wise decision- making that leads to God's realm...

puts you on that road home,

and it starts with this faithful person's decision...

looking forward, down the open road...in faith,

living the stories of faith into her own life story....

writing her own life possibilities

with each decision she makes!

(Pause)

I've been thinking about the moment of decision when a poor widow dropped her two coins into the offering box in the Temple.

It was a defining moment in her life, but most didn't see. And that's not why she did it: to be seen.

Maybe for others, that's the motivation, not her.

It would have gone totally unnoticed if Jesus had not been there. He's everywhere you know!

She is poor but has home, has work obviously. And, she emptied her wallet.

What's in your wallet?

Most of us are oblivious to the needs, choices, offerings of others, but not to our own wallets.

Her decision would have been lost or ignored among the "heavy hitters" in the Temple that day who could have noticed

except they were focused on themselves, not on others,

not on expressions of faithfulness or right relationship.

(I think this is Jesus' main point...

not empty your wallet!) x2

Gee...today, most of us wouldn't want Jesus to see us putting our offering in *that* box. Think about that!

While many were looking at the size of their gifts and the power it would afford them to "get their way" in the temple,

Jesus looked at the impact of the gift...not the impact on the temple, the impact on the giver.

And that made all the difference....
Giving here is about the giver...not the receiver!

...the difference this decision made was not so much the effect two coins would have on the temple

but the difference it made to her.

She gave her all to her relationship with God...
justice for all at the same time.

We think how hard, how frightening, how courageous, how gutsy to give her two coins!

She didn't pay her bills first, and then give....she gave first. **To her, this choice wasn't about money.**

It was all about her personal relationship with God.

The thought of that causes me to hold my breath!

But she doesn't seem tight/desperate at all in the story!

So my/our response to this is more about us
(how it would be *for us* to give our two coins
than it is about her).

I wonder what it felt like to her to drop those two coins in that box!

I wonder what opened up in her.

How did she avoid poor-mouthing herself...so many of us poor-mouthed ourselves even though

most of us have not missed a paycheck let alone

know the widow's situation...still
we hear ourselves saying we need to be careful.

We're afraid.

Many years ago, when we were moving across country to California, I marveled at the plan of the movers to load all our possessions, two cars, and a tent camper into their one moving van!

How on earth could all that fit?

It was neat....until I realized that if anything happened to that van, we would lose everything we had!

As it pulled out of the neighborhood, this amazing feeling came over me....not the feeling I expected at all...

what came over me was "good riddance, I'm free of all that stuff! I don't have to worry about a thing except the people I love! Please take your time going across country Mr. Van Driver." Hhmmnnn....

And while living in California, I remember the time one of wildfires made its way up the mountain we lived on,
the kids and I prepared to evacuate.

I sent them to grab the things from their rooms that were special to them....without giving them any guidance about that at all.

This *very small* pile of stuff accumulated in the foyer...very small....and again I was amazed how little,

beyond the kids and Ron,

had any lasting meaning to me either.

**It was an invitation to see what's most important through their eyes...to see their
decision
and to let it affect my decisions.**

**If I was tempted to scrimp on giving to others
in order to buy stuff for them,
that temptation had to go out the window.**

They just didn't care!

It wasn't about stuff...it wasn't a form of security to them.

Can your kids, can you, even remember what you got for Christmas last year?
But I bet you remember who you were with....

What had real value to them was relationship.
Our being together!!!

And this month, each of gets to pray and consider our relationship to each other and this holy place!

Would I have the courage in my heart to put my life, my income on the line
for the sake of my relationship to...not Tippe....
but to God and God's work, including the God in you....
like the widow did?

Most of us live in our wallets, not our hearts!
Yet hear me, this is not about money!!!

This is not about getting us to up our giving/pledging!

When I, if I can, release myself from any blame or shame
I am tempted to assign to this story,
would I be more like
the widow or

those in the crowd giving amounts that
can be more easily given,
tokens which don't have much impact on *their* lives?

Hear me, this is not about supporting a temple,
this is about the quality of life offered you in giving.

Now hear this:

You do make great decisions already....and you're making them from the inside out!
You are being so generous.
Isn't it amazing?

I marvel at what happens here as Session assures us that our ministry is right sized...

That they are aligning ministry and resources with intentions so there is no undue stress added...

we don't spend money we don't have while still doing all we need to do,

encouraging you to *right size* your life...aligning it with your desire to give...

I marvel at what is happening...

Folks are again increasing their giving.

How do you figure that?

We didn't all get COLA increases!

And some who are not able to give more,
are giving more in others ways.

Wow! Holy!!! What's going on here?

Ahh...the widow affect!

**For you....it's not about the money,
it's about the relationships you have here,
the relationships
ministry enables here.**

We need to be wary of becoming a modern version of the scribes: so many church-goers in so many churches

are much more comfortable talking about what they plan to give in terms of time and talents

than they are with talking what they are planning to give of their money which is harvested

as presence and relationships!

Some want it kept secret....but with God there are no secrets.

**Holding secrets, especially to make you look good,
hurts the heart, the life! Yours!**

Showing off, being judgmental, getting small, being grumpy/finicky, frugal to the point of being stingy...hurts....**YOU!**

Then, the only one who will want to be in relationship with you is...YOU.

How that must hurt God's heart!

In fact, I would say that if someone is so uncomfortable with their plan to give that they are hypersensitive about its confidentiality (mind you, confidentiality has never been broken here at Tippe but there are no secrets...counters count!)

...if you're still uncomfortable with your plan to give,
change the plan.....not for our sakes.....but for yours!

You see whatever you give, God gives so much more.

AND You can only receive from someone with whom you are in relationship. What?

AND God can't easily give to someone missing in action, missing from the **playing/praying field!**
Isn't present...seeking "home".

But God doesn't give up either!

In giving, you open yourself to receiving what God longs to give you....
just like the widow, like Ruth.

As long as you hold on to your money and time and talents and minimize the effect on your daily life of being in relationship with God,

*as long as you follow cultural norms or use financial excuses or fall for the trumped up anxiety all around you....
you fall backwards...stumble on the road...and can't get up!*

...you fall for the myth you can control your life,
or that you should *try to.*

Most importantly,
you close yourself off to what God is giving you.

**The deeper wisdom of our readings is not
about money at all!**

It's not about supporting a church? What's it about?

(Pause)

These are decisive times.....what you decide matters.

These need not be defensive times, divisive times.

This is the **perfect time**...to *live* the faith. Come home!

In your life, each moment is a decisive moment.

Our ministries depend on the faithful giving of our people...time, talent,
treasure...relationships!

But much more importantly, your well-being depends upon the decisions **you** make
for your life.

We wait to see what each of us has decided/is deciding...

not only at pledge time...

but when it's time to get up on Sunday morning,

put being here ahead of the challenge of getting here,
succumbing to a too full schedule.

We are making a choice, a decision when it's time to come, to hang greens soon,

come to the class that could be of help,
visit a shut-in,
cook a meal for Divine Intervention.

Living the stories of our faith...
not just studying them.

In a sense, the whole world is watching to see what we will put in the offering.

Milwaukee needs Tippe.
You do. It's all about relationship!
Enjoy that!

You are needed
and there are those here to help you
in your need as well.

It's about relationship.
It's about the decisions you make!

Tippe.
We risk our very existence in providing care.

We each face moments of decision that shape the future.

Some are more important, more complex or more dramatic than others,

but the truth is that our future is constantly being shaped
by a myriad of decisions we make every day.

Some times what appears as a small decision ends up having eternal consequences.

Stay on the road home...stay on the road home...