

Sermon for 31 October 2021 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17; Psalm 127; Hebrews 9:24-28; Mark 12:38-44

### ***“Integrity”***

The simple power of the poor widow’s donation would be enough for a whole hour of silence, if we were worshipping as the Quakers do. By singling it out, Jesus preached a huge sermon.

Like the story of Ruth, it gives a complete picture for us to meditate on, with Jesus pointing it out: “She out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

Of course it’s wrong to take it literally: Giving to the point of making ourselves dependent on others is not the same as totally relying on God to take good care of us. Jesus was harshly critical of religious people who gave for show, who rigidly fulfilled the law rather than seeing the point, as always, of loving God with all our heart, and our neighbor as ourself..

As we go towards our Charge Conference next Saturday, let us remember it’s not the quantity of our membership, but the variety of our projects that shows we’re alive and well as a fellowship.

I thought a lot about the word “integrity” this week. To hold up the idea that the world is full of opportunities to be kind, plenty of beauty to enjoy, and plenty of good will and good humor to build on and share, is not only full-time work, but healthy as well. To believe God is holding things together when we see so much falling apart is not Polly Anna-ish, but solid work, putting your money where your mouth is. I’ve been so proud and grateful for the way our building and grounds look ... like the neighborhood’s “not bad,” and folks “care about things,” is no small thing, don’t you agree?

Everyone here makes some contribution along these lines, both here on Sunday morning, and at home and out in the world during the week. You know that’s true. Thank God it’s true. The Bible is bedrock assistance here, if we use it wisely and prayerfully. Just the other day, Psalm 51 was the morning psalm in my devotions ... you know, the one that King David was supposed to have uttered after the prophet Nathan condemned him for stealing Bathsheba and trying to cover it up from her husband. It’s a great show. He begs God for forgiveness, and says “I was a sinner when I was in my mother’s womb.” I’m glad we have such a beautiful example of being sorry ... but I don’t think giving David credit for writing it gives us much spiritual guidance. The point it really makes is, human experience is full of being right and being wrong, but that doesn’t make wrong right. God’s got a lot of cleaning up to do, and it involves us, sinners and redeemers all in one body, each of us.

So, integrity, whether it's a poor widow's giving, or a foreign female sticking with her grieving mother-in-law through thick and thin, is the target for all our lives, and the basis for everything the whole creation stands for.

Follow through. Love each other. Don't stop at your doorstep. That noisy business we call politics has gone way out of line and the news doesn't deserve a lot of our time ... but if we don't give it some attention, we'll be worse off and sorrier for our kids as well ...

That's what it says in the Bible today.

Let us pray. Jesus, don't let our talk be cheap. Just because I'm up here, don't let us think I'm in charge or know more than these faithful attendees. Give us inspiration, and good humor, and more good ideas to follow through on this week... and bring us back safely to worship you on All Saints Sunday, in seven days.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.