

Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 27, Year B – November 10, 2024

“Give Us the Spirit of Jesus”

The Rev. Anne Hartley

ALL SAINTS EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SOUTH BURLINGTON, VERMONT

1 Kings 17:8-16 | Psalm 146 | Hebrews 9:24-28 | Mark 12:38-44

I’ve been thinking about the ways in which our community is coming together this stewardship season. The Holiday Bazaar helped us let go of things we don’t need to make money for the church. The money raised from the bazaar will keep the church running. It will be used for people to lead worship and ministries, manage the office, clean our buildings, plow snow in the winter, and to pay for utilities. Our pledges cover many of these expenses, too, but not all. Thank you to everyone who gave their time, talent, and treasure to this happy event, which brought our community together in joy and peace.

My favorite memory was dining at Gloria’s Café. Katrina and Erinn dished out soup in the kitchen, while two excellent servers, Charlie and Liam kept customers smiling. In church terms, Gloria’s Café was a great example of stewardship **and** evangelism. Charlie and Liam let everyone know the cafe was open for business, and served our community with joy and enthusiasm and attentiveness. I thought, what if each of us went out into the community and as enthusiastically invited a friend to come to the Christmas Eve pageant, or to come to church one Sunday, stay for a cup of coffee, then go out to brunch.

On Wednesday, we gathered on Zoom for a new 4-week class hosted by Joshua. This week, we talked about Naomi and Ruth, two of the many women in the Old Testament who took risks that paid off. In the ancient Hebrew culture, Naomi’s people viewed suffering and death as divine punishment for disobedience, so when a husband died, a wife could be saved or

“redeemed” by remarrying one of the husband’s relatives or by returning to her own mother’s home to remarry. When Naomi’s husband and sons died, Naomi decided to return home to Judah, where her family lived, and the community and laws protected widows. Naomi told her daughters-in-law to return to their mothers’ homes so they could find new husbands. One of them, Ruth, refused to abandon Naomi.

Ruth was a widow, too, and leaving her homeland of Moab meant she would arrive in Judah as a foreign widow—two strikes against her. So, this was a risky decision for both. Ruth’s choice was a selfless act, a reflection of her devotion. She promised Naomi, “Where you live, I will live. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God. Where you die, I will die...May God punish me severely if anything but death separates you and me.” Even with this promise of loyalty, Naomi felt more cursed than blessed. She asked to be called Mara (bitter), rather than Naomi (pleasant). She said this with Ruth standing by her side, having just pledged her loyalty.

This story invites us to think about who the Ruths are in our lives. Who are the people who stand by our side? Are we open to receiving God’s comfort through their love and attentiveness?

Naomi and Ruth’s story is filled with evidence of God’s protective care, though God isn’t mentioned by name anywhere in the book. Ruth did not have riches or power, but her steadfast love made her noble in the eyes of a “kinsman redeemer,” who would marry Ruth and secure their future. In this story written many centuries before Jesus was born, Ruth offered all that she had—her loyalty and love—and that was enough. God took care of the rest.

In the Gospel today, we learned about stewardship through another story about a widow. As Jesus watched people put large sums of money into the treasury, he didn't single out the ones who gave large sums. Instead, he pointed to the widow who gave all she had—two coins. When we heard that many rich people put in large sums of money, we recall an earlier teaching when Jesus told the rich disciple to “sell everything you own and follow me.” If the young man sold everything to follow Jesus, he would be taking a greater risk, making him lean on his faith in a God who protects and provides. The widow did exactly that. She gave her last two coins to the temple.

In this story, we realize that we don't need to be embarrassed or ashamed if we don't have thousands to give to the church. If we give what we have freely, we are living into our lives as disciples.

The widow's two coins may also represent faith. When we grow discouraged, and dedicate the little faith we have remaining to continuing God's work, that, too, is enough. Whatever we give—our prayers and our actions—will come to fruition in God's time, not always in the way we expect. When we feel like we have no faith left to give, and we pray and give and serve anyway, our two coins worth of faith will have more value to God than the riches of others.

Through these three facets of ministry—the bazaar, the class, and worship together, we learn to give selflessly. All of these things happened at All Saints' in the past two weeks alone!

I learned something about stewardship and evangelism at the Diocesan convention yesterday, too. The guest speaker asked us, “what does it mean to do church?” She called on a Cathedral full of church leaders—lay and ordained—to remember that our work is to meet people's needs in our communities and to work for a lasting peace. We can find out what people

need by being in relationship with them. Giving is a mutual ministry. It transforms our lives by connecting us with other people.

You may have wondered at some point, why not volunteer and give directly to charities? Why build a church and pay to run it? We give to the church for many reasons: to carve out space and time in our lives to worship God, to remind ourselves that there is a greater power; to learn and grow in the faith, by examining our own lives and bringing ourselves into right relationship with God, and to be in a Christ-centered community, where we try to live in a way that gives us and others a glimpse at God's kingdom on earth.

In the coming months, the vestry will be discussing what types of ministries we want to do in 2025, while we build a budget that reflects and supports those ministries. What ministries would you like to help organizing next year? Send me an email and we'll get together over a cup of coffee to dream and plan.

Let us close with a prayer.

This is another day, O Lord. I know not what it will bring forth, but make me ready, Lord, for whatever it may be.

If I am to stand up, help me to stand bravely.

If I am to sit still, help me to sit quietly.

If I am to lie low, help me to do it patiently.

And if I am to do nothing, let me do it gallantly.

Make these words more than words, and give me the Spirit of Jesus. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer, p. 461