

Sacrifice and Security

Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17 and Psalm 127

1 Kings 17:8-16

Hebrews 9:24-28

Mark 12:38-44

All is change. The pre-Socratic philosopher, Heraclitus, famously said No one can step into the same river twice. Heraclitus wrote none of his findings. Judaism and Christianity proclaim that God is immutable, though the Lord does change his mind. Jesus commission to Love (which I take to mean twenty-four/seven) implies significant growth for any disciple.

Writing in Romans, Paul confirms. 12:2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Change begins with strong determination and the gathering of one's thoughts and, perhaps, of one's things.

Marriage almost certainly brings the most change into anyone's life and mind after the nuptials and entry into marriage. The concept of authority adapts from a constancy of parental guidance to development sharing—husband is authority on some matters, the wife on others.

In today's reading Naomi advises Ruth that Boaz "will tell you what to do."

The Old Testament award of wife as property meant husband most often commanded, but he was subject to wife in other realms. Spousal roles form and become part of every culture and serve to facilitate tranquility.

Wedlock enhances a sense of belonging to both husband and wife, though harm inevitably follows when a spouse sees partner *belonging* to him or her. Are interjections of jealousy sin? Possessiveness harms many relationships, and many partners never learn how to get past unhelpful feelings.

Jesus' teaching about scribes (and assumedly most of the Pharisees) indirectly gets at possessiveness and possessions. Some religious and secular higher-ups seem to believe they own people, especially those unable to resist. Then, to use the Savior's words, "they devour widows' houses."

After issuing his findings on scribblers, Christ immediately sits down to observe contributions at the treasury. The comparison between the rich and poor widow is factual, but his attitude shows by his comparison. The contribution from the widow of all she is substantial when weighted against the abundance of rich people. My mental

image is that Jesus views the rich and the scribes as misbehaving children. But, secure children.

Good kids are discussed in the readings.

In the Psalm, sons are both heritage from the Lord and a reward. The father is a happy man when he has many sons, though some turn out poorly. Yet, no son will refuse to defend his ancestral home or "enemies in the gate."

Ruth, not a child physically, is obedient daughter-in-law and then wife. She provides security for Naomi, who sacrifices, or not, nursing Boaz and Ruth's son Obed. The sons mentioned at the end of Ruth's verses are destined for high glory, ending with the near perfect David.

Perfection only sits with God, and complete security never exists. I sat on a computer security task force—would you believe 1972?—and the main take-away was complete safety for our data was impossible. We determined the steps to move from Everything is contained in the computer room to online, but the main conclusion was Security is ongoing and continuous enhancement is gonna be necessary.

Thus I say that the rich with their abundance are often far from secure, and the widows in the readings have more security than some of the rich. Naomi charges Ruth with marriage and the result quiets Mother-in-law's mental state.

In the alternate reading from 1 Kings, Elijah is charged by God to travel to find temporary security. He encounters the widow who the Lord directs him to seek, who provides the prophet with her last remaining food. Her faith makes her secure, and her jar for flour and jug for oil are filled and remain filled.

The widow at the treasury gives all she has. The woman is willing to part with her last cash, and her faith tells her God will provide. I doubt she would leave all her means of exchange if her feelings were based solely upon hope. Her sacrifice was still immense, but her faith was huge.

As was Ruth's. Hard to imagine a woman's loss of virginity was anything but significant sacrifice. Ruth's will to obey her mother-in-law overcame any feelings of loss. Naomi sacrificed her notion of right in telling daughter to sleep with Boaz. No loss for Boaz is recorded, but men entering marriage almost always give up something. Even the man (or woman) contracting betrothal with a rich fiancée sacrifices—he or she works for every penny.

In Jesus time and before, divorced women and widows were poor, many very poor. Ex-husbands and kinsmen have little, if any, obligation to help those impoverished by unexpected circumstance. I dunno about former spouses, but righteous

relatives do help their poor relations. Here, there and everywhere.

In the Hebrews reading from the Lectionary, the priest does actual sacrifice. "The high priest goes ... once a year ... taking the blood that he offers for himself and for the sins committed unintentionally by the people." He has blood on his hands (9:25)—any commentary obscured by the sacrifice of Jesus.

Our theology reveals how the Old Testament sacrifices merely foreshadowed the ultimate redemption that Christ would accomplish. The implication of this verse is that Christ's one-time offering serves as a definitive act, establishing a new covenant that grants believers direct access to God and security in salvation.

Salvation is far away for most of us, and, with glory, omni present in the afterlife. Not so much in the present. Ruth obtains security through her husband, and, perhaps, from Obad if she lives longer than Boaz. In the days of the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles, the concept of security was mostly male. For many men, their bases for safety remain fixed in the ways of the Old Testament.

The basis for a widow's security often remained wanting until civilization invented retirement plans. Naomi overcame her fear of the future through Ruth.

The widow who provided succor to Elijah had no security until he arrived—she was anticipating her death and her son's. The prophet offered her God's word that all would be okay. Did she see or feel the spirit surrounding Elijah?

The poor woman at the treasury had no security—assumedly her faith gave her comfort. I say assumedly because the word Faith appears in the Old Testament only twice. In Deuteronomy 32, The Song of Moses, the ungodly are labeled Children in whom there is no faith. In later translations, faith morphs into faithfulness. Faith is a state, perhaps unknown to the workers who wrote Old Testament, probably due to two-dimensional thinking. Faithfulness embodies action, and the stem faith occurs sixty times in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Faith as state appears in Luke 2 in the Word about another widow, the prophetess Anna.

Luke 42:002:037 And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

Anna then praises God and the redemption of Jerusalem. In most translations she speaks about the Christ child.

I have been surprised more than once to find little mention of sacrifice in the Gospels—and what is written describes sacrifices such as burnt offerings. Any sacrifices linked to love must be indirect. The sacrifices of Ruth and the widows have basis in law, but they also track love and faith.

Sex, marriage, nourishment, sons (and daughters), and blood are fundamental to life. The readings today embrace them all in the context of security. The neighbors of Naomi see God as restorer of life—in this case from insecurity.

Restoration in the texts implies coming together.

Naomi became one with Boaz' family when Ruth bore a son, as the mother-in-law had a next-of-kin. The two women's needs led them to disobedience of at least one commandment, but the culture of Moses and Joshua apparently allowed avoidance of punishment.

In the Pentateuch when a betrothed pair committed advanced their clock, culture provided No Harm, No Penalty. Yet, plenty of rules punished those who got into trouble. Perhaps the worst penalty was to females who were not virgins on their wedding night.

Deuteronomy 05:022:020 But if this thing be true, and the tokens of virginity be not found for the damsel:

Deuteronomy 05:022:021 Then they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones that she die: because she hath wrought folly in Israel, to play the whore in her father's house: so shalt thou put evil away from among you.

Stiff punishment for disobedience! And limited to women! Are there any penalties limited to men? Even in a more liberated world, new husbands discover a big lie on wedding night. For many men, the anticipated coming together is possibly debased, certainly scarred and sometimes the newlywed questions everything.

The march of societal development tempers extreme behavior, whether by negative imperative Thou Shalt Not Kill or by Jesus single commandment. Our lives are facilitated (usually) by culture—sometimes by unwritten rules, some of which we are unaware. The rules make for dampening of extreme behavior and greater permissiveness where man and woman has advanced. No one knows all the affects and effects of the Judeo-Greco-Christian-Roman culture which surrounds us today.

When Jesus' command to love would be more obeyed, life theoretically gets better. Compromising the Savior's guidance are those who ignore the commission and take advantage of

others and, thus, do not love. More love leads to more enlightenment, justice, mercy and grace.