

“God’s recipe”

- Last week or so, Katy had me cooking a gumbo, and I was worried- it did not look good
 - You see, at the Perkins house, we have a nice division of labor that is working pretty well, I think
 - We share the meal prep responsibilities in a way that makes sure we get to eat dinner together at a reasonable time
 - Katy typically creates a menu for us a week or two before, we go to the grocery store and buy the ingredients for the menu
 - And then each afternoon when Gaius and I come home, because we practically have no commute and get here much earlier
 - It is my job to cook the meal Katy has picked out while she is driving home from work
 - All in all, she walks in at about 6:30 and dinner is ready
 - Like I said, most of the time it works great, and I have come to enjoy the cooking more than I ever thought I would
 - And plus, whoever cooks usually gets a pass on the cleanup after!
 - So the other day, it was gumbo, and it was a new recipe that I had never cooked before
 - The ingredients were all thawed out in the refrigerator ready to go
 - And I began following the recipe- as I always do, BTW, I don’t cook unless I have a recipe to follow
 - And as I went through each step, things just didn’t really look right. They didn’t smell right.
 - It felt all wrong, and I was more than a little worried about how this thing was going to turn out.
 - And there was a lot of it! A lot of ingredients, a lot of time put into the chopping and the multiple stages of preparation
 - And I could not see how this was going to turn out well.
 - I almost pulled the plug and ordered something with Grubhub, which is the standard backup plan on any given night
 - I called Katy, and I told her about the new recipe, and that I was not very optimistic about it...
 - you know, gotta set appropriate expectations here

- But we decided to go on, and if it really is terrible, we'll go out to eat when she gets here
- Now after about another 30 minutes or so, the whole pot of gumbo changed- the smell changed, the color changed,
- Everything about it all of a sudden came together in a way that I simply could not imagine in the beginning
- And it was good- really good, despite my skills as a chef, and my own pessimism
- We ate on it all week without complaint- I think it even got better as it sat in the fridge.
- And it reminded me, especially this week, on a very basic level, just how God often works in our lives and in this world
- Taking some of the most unexpected ingredients, seeing through past the nastiest of obstacles and frustrations
- And still managing to create something beautiful, holy, and hopeful.
- This came through to me this week in two of our readings loud and clear
- We encounter two examples of God working in the lives of faithful women
 - Despite the circumstances in which they find themselves
 - And these readings contain a message for us today
 - We encounter Ruth and Naomi this morning, two widows who have lost their husbands and family, and seemingly have nothing but each other
 - Ruth returns with Naomi, leaving her country behind and taking residence as a foreigner in Bethlehem, of all places
 - Ruth exhibits amazing loyalty and compassion for her mother in law, and promises to care for her
 - Life could not have been easy for these two women
 - As widows, it would have been very difficult for them in this society to provide for themselves
 - And Ruth is from another country- a foreigner
 - It was during this time that the high priest was Ezra, who focused on ethnic purity,
 - So much so he even in some cases required men who were married to foreigners to leave their wives and children¹
 - All apart of his belief that God wanted them to be culturally pure
 - So it could not have been easy

¹ <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship/lectionary-calendar/twenty-fourth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-B>

- So this story has it all- patriarchy, sexism, oppression, treatment of women as property, and even xenophobia and cultural cleansing
- But Ruth endures it all to stay faithful to God, and to love and care for her mother-in-law
- And in the midst of all of that injustice and oppression, her light continued to shine, and God continued to work
- It was Ruth's commitment to Naomi that revealed her true character- and that caught the eye of Boaz ²
- With a little bit of planning, little bit of seduction and strategy, and a lot of self-sacrifice on Ruth's part
- She married Boaz, a distant relative of their former husbands, thus securing her and Naomi's livelihood.
- And Boaz defied authorities and married Ruth, a Moabite, even though the high priest disapproved.
- Seeing rightly that who Ruth was on the inside- strong, loyal, loving, faithful- was more important than the societal conventions
- And that is not all that came out of this unlikely union-
- Ruth, a Moabite, gave birth to Obed, who fathered Jesse, who fathered David, a great king who united the tribes of Israel³
- And you know who else was born in Bethlehem in the line of David...
- What gets me about this today, the good news that I need to remember
- Is that God can work amazing things with two or three faithful people
- Even when all the other ingredients are adding up to be a disaster.
- So many years later, as Jesus enters the scene, we see that similar circumstances are still present
 - To set the stage, Jesus has just come from a conversation with a Scribe
 - A familiar reading that we missed thanks to All Saints taking precedence last week
 - Jesus has just been asked what is the first, and greatest, commandment - the big one
 - And from that conversation, Jesus says: Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength
 - And love your neighbor as yourself
 - And then warns everyone listening to beware of those who do not do that,

² http://www.ucc.org/worship_samuel_sermon_seeds_november_8_2015

³ <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship/lectionary-calendar/twenty-fourth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-B>

- Who instead seek honor for themselves while devouring widow's houses all in the name of God
- Then he goes to the temple, and sits opposite of the treasury-
- It is like they are squaring off in some ways: Jesus v. the Temple authorities
- It is also true that this is the last time Jesus speaks in the temple⁴
- And then, right on queue, a widow enters the temple and gives her two copper coins
- A widow, who much like Ruth and Naomi, is probably desperate and scared, and wondering about her immediate future
- She still gives, she still hangs on to her faith, even as the same old patterns of injustice bear down upon her
- Jesus says she has given more with those two coins than the wealthy who put in out of abundance
- It's easier to give \$1 when you have a million, harder to give a dollar when it's your only one
- Much like the other two widows before, we have another widow who seems to show an immense amount of faith
 - Even as everything is against her- she does it in the face of so many obstacles
- She gives to God even though she may not know where the next coin is going to come from- that's huge, that's faith
- That is very similar to Ruth who leaves her homeland and travels with Naomi, not knowing how they will survive
- Knowing what we know from before and what God was able to do with Ruth, Naomi and Boaz's faithfulness
- I kind of wish the Gospel would go on...
- I wonder what God cooked up with this widow's two copper coins.
- Because it is amazing what God can do, in spite of the circumstances, with faithful people
- The world is different today for you and me than it was in either of these narratives we read from our Scripture
 - On the one hand, much progress has been made, things are better
 - We enjoy some of the highest quality of living in history, and I am thankful for our forebears for the principles on which they founded our country
 - I am also mindful of that today that as we celebrate Veterans Day, thankful to all of you and all veterans who serve this country

⁴ <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/proper27b>

- Without you, the freedoms we have carved out, and the progress we *have* made, would be vulnerable to outside threats
- So we thank you this weekend, and every weekend, for the sacrifice each of you have made to protect this great country
- We also celebrated Armistice Day, the end to WWI
- And even the destruction of the Berlin Wall
- There is a lot to celebrate
- I also know our work is not yet finished... our country has still work to do to move towards the noble and lofty goals of liberty and justice for all
 - There is still plenty of oppression and desperation today worldwide
 - It's been 2500 years since the book of Ruth was written, and 2000 since Jesus sat down across from the treasury
 - Since then we have made tremendous progress...
 - We have invented an entirely new form of government since then called democracy (voting reminded me of that this week)
 - Achieved miraculous technological advances, and great advances in human rights
 - And yet some things remain the same- still economic oppression exists, inequity between men and women, between races
 - There is still xenophobia and the instinct to fear and ostracize those who like Ruth are from different places
 - The poor still worry about their next coin, their next meal
 - And I admit there are times I can get frustrated at just how slowly progress comes, and how even at times it seems to take a step backward
 - So I look today to these readings for hope
 - Because not only is God in the fight change the world,
 - Operating on a national and global level to bring about God's Kingdom for all children of God
 - God is also in the here and now, with you and me, right here in the trenches
 - And in fact, I think God does most of God's work to change the world, right here with you and me
 - Because it is amazing what God can cook up with just a few faithful people, even if it does not look good at first
 - Just take Ruth and the generous widow
 - Take a look at Mary and Joseph; Peter, James and John, and the other rag tag group of disciples
 - And then look in the mirror.

- I wrote this week in the Sword, in regards to the election, to be the Christian that no election can bring about, or prevent
- Start with the greatest commandment: to love God completely, more than yourself, more than the other things that clamor for our attention
- And then love other people because God loves them- start with compassion, a generous heart, and go from there
- Remember that God works through very unlikely people, so begin to be curious about where God is working today
- God is still cooking that ancient recipe of love, and care of neighbor
- Sometimes it is hard to see how, with all of the things going on around us, that God can make something good come about
- But that is what God does, that is God's recipe, take all of the world and redeem it.
- And it's amazing what God can do with just a few faithful people.
- Go be one.

Amen.