

Well, what a time we have had! The 2024 Presidential election seemed like a climax of a frenzied fight. We may as well have been watching a boxing match, or a horse race. We might have all gone a bit nuts with laser focus on one set of ideas, one channel of newscasts, or perhaps we have been truly dedicated to working together and to make our country better. I hope it is the latter!

So speaking of Hope, regardless of how we voted, whether we are initially commiserating and crying over a beer, or rejoicing with cake and ice cream... As followers of Jesus, we must always be a people with Hope, a people with hopes and dreams, for a better country, for everyone getting in touch with their “better angels,” to keep quoting Lincoln!

I personally still have hope for the House and the Senate, that there will be some *bipartisan* work, some *bipartisan* agreements, the spirit of negotiation and compromise. We have to negotiate and compromise with our families and neighbors all the time; as we all hone those skills, may our legislators do the same in the hallowed halls of Congress!

As people of faith, we can keep on advocating the best and universally applicable teachings of our faith. The month of November is typically stewardship time, and the gospel reading for this morning in Mark 12 surely deals with the topic of money. The story is famously known as “The widow’s mite” (love that King James phrase). In modern day English, we simply say “two small coins.” Note that Jesus is *not*

actually *critical* of the rich folk; he simply observes that they gave “out of their abundance.” The paraphrase of “The Message” says that the rich folk “gave what they’ll never miss,” while the widow gave “what she couldn’t afford, she gave her all.”

We bring our own pondering and imagination to the Bible stories; I imagine that the widow that Jesus saw gave regularly to the work of the Temple out of her loyalty to God. She probably knew the scripture lesson of the 10 Commandments that we are to “have no other Gods.” Or she might have even known of Jesus’ teaching to “*Seek First* the Kingdom of God,” or his teaching that the Greatest Commandment is to love God with all mind, soul and strength. So for her it was a *priority* to give to the Treasury at the Temple.

Yes, the story of the Widow’s Two small Coins is quite straightforward and clear... Jesus praised the widow for giving, as a loyalty and priority to God’s work, even though she was poor, for giving “her all.” She would have been following the common admonition to give to God’s work, as a priority, as perhaps the first check we write on a regular basis when paying bills. People sometimes say that our checkbook or bank statement tells the priorities of our life.

I think that suggested reading from the book of Ruth is also helpful at stewardship time. Ruth was a widow who also gave sacrificially... and she did so out of Love! She loved her mother-in-law Naomi, and wanted to companion her in her

older age. So Ruth leaves her people, leaves her country, leaves her religion, saying “Whither thou goest, I will go! Your people shall be my people, here you lodge, I will lodge, where you die, I will die!” Why do I think this is relevant? Because our giving to Belleville Church and its work for God is giving to a particular people, our special people, our community! It is a loyalty based on Love, love that has grown over time, love that also welcomes newcomers as special people.

I refer to Ruth’s love and loyalty to her mother-in-law Naomi because we know so many people here as a kind of mother, father, sister, brother... as Jesus himself said... “Who are my family? Those here who are doing the will of God.” Ben’s letter for the Board of Stewardship and Finance reflects this well... He mentions many people who keep good and faithful things going here... as well as affirming that there are also many “unsung heroes and heroines.” We come here for two main reasons: Love and loyalty to God and God’s work in the spirit of Jesus, and also love and loyalty to the other members as we support one another, with our hands and our hearts.

That pretty much says it all. So let me close with a song. I wrote this song at a previous inauguration, in 2009, but I feel it is still most appropriate. It’s simple emphasis is that we have to work *together*. We even have to work with the spirit of Ruth who reached across the aisles of culture and religion! Ruth created a diverse community, as a Moabite living in her

new Israelite culture. She broke the chains of tribal loyalty for a new loyalty based on love. Here's my song:

“Keep Hope Alive” (Ross Varney, c.2009)

1. *Times are hard today, will we find our way? A leader comes along, and says we will be strong... says that change is on the way, and good is sure to come. Highest hopes and expectations for all that can be done! **So keep hope alive, just give it time. If together we strive, new light will shine. We will thrive together over time. Yes, we'll thrive together over time.***

2. *Change can't happen overnight, patience is the way. It takes hard work to make things right, one step day by day. And no one has the gifts to do all the work that's there, and to wish for that would only send us falling to despair. **Refrain.***

3. *People dream of glory, a future that will be. But what is our real story, and what's just fantasy? Change can't come to all of us if leaders work alone; each and every one of us must make a cause our own! **(Refrain).***

A different time, different leaders, but our work is still very much the same. Our work is to tune our lives to the Way of Christ as best we can and influence our legislators to do the same in national and international affairs. Our ultimate goal will always be more Peace/Harmony in our world!