

# Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections  
based on this week's lectionary readings

November 8, 2015  
Proper 27B/Ordinary 32B/Pentecost 24

## The readings this week:

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

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

## "My Way" or a "Widows Way"?

Of all things valued in our culture and society, independence must rank very high.

We are schooled to develop it, trained to maintain it, resist the loss of it; God knows we have even gone to war to protect it. We speak of fierce independence. It is a quality of life we will fiercely defend.

Another value of our culture is faith. We inculcate faith in our children, we encourage not only faith but faithfulness. "In God we trust" though somewhat discounted these days is still a motto for many.

Yet I have observed from my work with people who are in the second half of life and thus more aware of ageing, that faith often grows in inverse proportion to independence. It is often as we lose the independence that made Frankie sing "My Way" that we are able to allow dependence on the Greater Self, the True Self what we call God, to emerge.

I am speaking here of course of faith as trust. The more common understanding of faith as belief in doctrines is an unfortunate translation of the Greek word "pistis". Trust is often a fruit that grows in the compost of decaying independence. It is this abandonment of oneself to something deeper and less programmed and planned than our independence plans and investments which jumps out at me from the gospel for this Sunday. The story of the widow's gift is a story of abandonment to God's provision. It is not a teaching for stewardship Sunday or any fund-raising drive for that matter. Would that the church could learn to trust God more for its sustenance and depend less on its fundraisers and hedge-fund managers, like the widow did.

I am presently involved in a second-half of life transition. I would love to say mid-life but that would mean I am going to live to be one hundred and ten! My transition has been the most exciting adventure of deciding it was time to stop what I have been doing for the past thirty years, and then waiting for the flux

that the decision created, to take form. I have been astounded at the providence of God, and the doors and avenues that have opened that I could never have dreamt. But, only after I had thrown it all into the treasury!

My "new life" that begins in exactly one month's time could never have been planned or strategized for by me acting independently. It seems after thirty years I will have to begin preaching what I preached.

"My Way" may have been Frank Sinatra's way. I prefer to advocate the "Widow's Way".

Give it all to God and be surprised.

~ Peter Woods, [The Listening Hermit](#)

## On Psalm 127

*If GOD doesn't build the house,  
the builders only build shacks.  
If GOD doesn't guard the city,  
the night watchman might as well nap.  
It's useless to rise early and go to bed late,  
and work your worried fingers to the bone.  
Don't you know he enjoys  
giving rest to those he loves?*

I love the true story of Henry Ford driving alone to work one day through the Michigan countryside when he came up on a man whose Model T Ford had broken down. The guy was bent over and under the hood trying to figure what was wrong. Mr. Ford stopped and asked if he could take a look. In a few seconds, he had made an adjustment and he started the car running. The grateful owner said, "I'm amazed at your ability; you fixed my car so easily." Ford laughed, "I ought to be able to fix it, because I'm the one who designed it." Since God designed humanity the same is true with us. It is a simple thing for the Designer, when we finally remember to ask for His help, to make whatever adjustments are needed that fixes whatever's wrong with us.

~ Pastor Ed Rea, [Packing House](#)

# Reflecting on the Word



## \_\_\_ 1st Reading: [Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17](#)

How does Naomi plan for Ruth's future? What does the birth of Obed mean to Naomi? What is the turning point in Naomi's life from the bitterness she expressed as she returned to Bethlehem to the joy she feels at the end of the story? Naomi's grandson becomes an ancestor of King David and is mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1:5. What do you learn about God from the amazing ways in which he blesses Naomi after all her tragedies? In what ways has God shown his faithfulness to you and changed your sorrow to joy? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

## \_\_\_ Psalm Reading: [Psalm 127](#)

What challenges to faith are you currently facing in your workplace? What basis is offered in this passage for the worth of our work? Why is it foolish to work long hours? Children are a gift from God and are a sign of his favor on those who do worthwhile work. In what ways has God rewarded you for good work? How does your attitude toward work shape how you view your personal relationships? In what way do you need the rest that the Lord grants "to those he loves"? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)



## Praying Toward Sunday

Few are chosen, God; the wealthy, the famous, the powerful, the intelligent, the connected, these are the ones chosen and set apart in our world.

But, you choose differently, and you ask us to do the same. So, teach us to choose simplicity for the sake of those who are simple; teach us to choose moderation for the sake of those who have less than enough; teach us to choose humility for the sake of those who are humiliated; teach us to choose collaboration for the sake of those who are oppressed; teach us to choose listening for the sake of those who are silenced; teach us to choose forgiveness for the sake of those who are unforgiven.

May our choices be dictated, not by our perceptions and judgments, but by your grace and your Gospel, and may we gladly rejoice when you choose us to bring your love to others.

In Jesus' name  
Amen.

~ [John van de Laar](#)

The widow's mite. A reading not just about stewardship, but about the very essence of our faith – generosity. This is kingdom life. Sharing something of the riches we have been given. Sharing something of the faith we have been given. Sharing something of the gifts we have been given. Generosity.

I feel very envious of the widow who gave her all, do you? And not just envious, but also perhaps shame. She gave her all. How often do we hold back a little something ... or maybe even a big something? How often are our hearts not fully in it? How often is our service half hearted ... or as the church at Laodicea discovered ... how often is our service lukewarm?

But let's not beat ourselves up too much here. Whilst a little bit of guilt is a healthy thing, it needs to lead to response and action. There is the opportunity for us to redeem ourselves, to be transformed, to give extravagantly.

I hope my service this week will be extravagant.  
I hope my example this week will be extravagant.  
I hope my worship this week will be extravagant.  
I hope my love will be extravagant.

~ Neil Chappell, [A Weird Thing](#)



## \_\_\_ 3rd Reading: [Hebrews 9:24-28](#)

What are all the ways the author states again that Jesus is greater than the old order? The last 2 verses talk about what happens when a man dies. How is the death of Christ different from the death of man? How does verse 28 define "judgment" for "those who eagerly await Him"? Are you one who eagerly awaits? How does that show in your daily life? [Lake Forest Church](#)

## \_\_\_ 4th Reading: [Mark 12:38-44](#)

How is the widow a model for giving? How is the religious institution to which she belongs taking advantage of her? Is it wrong to invite the poor to give to the church? Why or why not? How is this offering an indication of the widow's faith? What is the price of her costly offering? How might a church prioritize between an emphasis on proper worship and governance and a focus on service to others? In what way is your faith community a sign of the new reality Jesus proclaims? [Feasting on the Word](#)