

As my children and grandchildren can tell you, I am very fond of stories, especially (and I know this sounds silly) fairy tales and children’s stories. There are lots of different features in fairy tales, and the one for us to consider right now is the concept “little,” the idea of “small.” Think of how many fairy tales and stories have something little in them. There are the three little kittens, and the three little pigs. There is the “teeny tiny” woman. There is the tiny pea under the mattress that kept the real princess awake. There was the tiny little man Rumpelstiltskin who could spin straw into gold. There were Cinderella’s small feet. There were the magic beans that grew into a giant beanstalk. All these things were little, and they were all very, very important parts of the stories.

Perhaps that is just how this world works—little things can make a big difference. Our two Bible stories for this morning have little but important features.

The story from the Old Testament is the story of Ruth, a foreign woman; her mother-in-law, Naomi; and Boaz, a landowner and relative to Naomi’s family. Both Naomi and Boaz were home-town folks, from Bethlehem.

Now, if you know the story of Ruth, you know that before the verses we read, there was a lot of other background and action in the story. Naomi and Ruth had been in Moab. Naomi had gone there with her husband when there had been a famine. Then, later, Naomi and Ruth had been widowed. That was a great tragedy for women then. It could often mean starvation and death. They had been in Moab, but during the story, then came back to Bethlehem.

When they got there, they depended on the work-welfare system. [Michael E. Williams, in Volume 4, *Old Testament Women, The Storyteller’s Companion*] That meant that Ruth, being the younger and stronger of the pair, worked in the fields, gleaning whatever the harvest crew dropped or left behind, especially in the corners. That was the system, the harvest crew left these places for the poor people to glean. So, Ruth and Naomi were going to be living on the leftovers, the leavings, a little bit.

However, it just so happened that Boaz, Naomi’s relative, owned those fields. He took a shine to Ruth. He admired her devotion and faithfulness to her mother-in-law. He saw that she had good treatment, and plenty of grain.

So, in the verses which we read, Boaz and Ruth end up getting married, and having a baby named Obed, who was the father of Jesse, who was the father of the great king David, who was an ancestor of Jesus.

From near starvation, to field work, to marriage, to children, to a king, to THE KING. Isn’t it interesting how God worked all that out?

Naomi was old—needing security.

Ruth was young--needing a husband.

Boaz was older—needing a wife and children. [United Methodist Church Worship page]

And the generations to come were going to need a good king. And we were going to need a Savior. Who knows what God will make of our decisions and actions, both large and small?

Then we have the story about Jesus, in the book of Mark. Actually, it’s more a story of what Jesus observed and his comments.

It started by Jesus' observation about the scribes. The scribes were the religious experts of the day. In Jesus' opinion, the scribes had all become show-offs. They wore fancy robes for clothes—too fancy to let them work or hurry. (And I felt a little funny putting on this robe myself!) They demanded all the best places—at parties, at the marketplace—whatever would give them prominence. They even prayed to show off—long and loud prayers to impress people. Well, no one likes a show-off!

Even worse was the practice of, as Jesus said, devouring widows' houses. You, see the Temple, the place of worship, had a treasury, and that was meant to help the widows and orphans of the time, who had a very hard time of it. But somehow, that money went to support the lavish lifestyle of the scribes. It made me think of Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker with their gold bathroom faucets, back in the days before they repented. Lavish lifestyles, on the backs of those who could ill afford it.

So Jesus was rather interested in the Treasury money—how it was spent, and who contributed. He watched the contributors.

It says in the Bible that, "Many rich people put in large sums." Well, that was good of them. Still, it was not that impressive, it was probably nothing they would even notice.

Then Jesus saw something that did make him take notice.

"One poor widow came up and put in two small coins—a measly two cents." [The Message]

Wow! She was trying to help others, even though the system hadn't helped her. What a kind and generous and caring nature she must have had!

She gave sacrificially and she didn't hold back. She had faith that God would look after her.

Jesus was greatly impressed. As he put it, the rich folks were giving from their wealth, a small percentage of what they had. The woman, who had next to nothing, was giving 100%.

Now, two cents may not sound like much to us. However, with enough people giving two cents, it adds up. Nowadays, we could also have compound interest, and eventually we would have a million dollars! And we could use it.

Okay, that was a long time ago. So here's something that started in 1938—also with some small coins. It is still happening. You've all heard of it. It's called the March of Dimes. People—men, women, and children—all over America contributed dimes, the ten cent coins, to help provide treatment for polio, and fund research for its prevention and create a vaccine. It got started because President Franklin Roosevelt had had polio, and people got inspired to do something about that devastating disease, which caused so much disability and death.

A dime is a little, skinny coin. It doesn't buy much these days. But ten of them make a dollar. And so it goes.

So, what did a dime buy?

--In the 1930's it bought a quart of milk.

--In 1937 it bought a copy of "On the banks of Plum Creek" by Laura Ingalls Wilder.

--In 1945, a dime bought a hot dog or two bottles of Coca-Cola.

--In 1948, it bought a bag of popcorn at the fairground, or a one-way subway fare from Times Square to Coney Island.

--In 1950, a dime bought a cup of coffee.

--In 1960, it bought a pay phone call. (Remember pay phones?)[[March of Dimes website](#)]

So, giving a dime really meant giving up, say, a couple of Cokes. A good trade really—two less Cokes for a healthy person and a nice little contribution for a sick person.

Nowadays, the organization continues on, to prevent birth defects. And it all started with dimes!

So very much can be accomplished with even the little things we do to serve God.

We can give our time, say a phone call to check on someone, and brighten their day, or an invitation to come worship here.

Or we can give our time as we are doing right now, being in worship to learn and receive inspiration and Christian fellowship. The benefits of this giving come to us and others.

We can give gifts, of money, of things. Give up a trip to Starbucks, or McDonald's or the mall, and give to serve God.

Just think of what can be accomplished, with God's help, if we give! Even the little things can amount to a lot.

This church itself was started with the generosity of working-class people. It was once a small basement church. And look at it now! Bit by bit, penny by penny, prayer by prayer, dollar by dollar, it keeps on going to be a Christian caring presence in this community.

We all can make a difference. We can give, in little ways, in the big ways, in whatever ways we can, to serve God. And God can take all of that and bring it together and bring about something wonderful.

May it be so. Amen.

(By Reverend Sally J. DeMasters)