

November 8, 2015 GOD TURNS LIABILITIES INTO ASSETS
By Rev. Paul Evans, with Rev. Dr. Junie Ewing

Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17 and Mark 12:38-48

PAUL: A teen-age boy was interviewing for a job at the local discount store. Toward the end of the interview, the manager asked the young man a tough question: "How would you treat an IRATE Customer?" The boy thought for a moment, then said: "I'd treat him or her just the same as the customer before and the customer after." The young man was hired on the spot! Later his mom asked about the interview. "I guess it went really well because I got the job!" Then the boy added: "By the way, Mom, what does IRATE mean?"

Because the young man did not know what the word "irate" means, he had to think up an answer that could apply to All Kinds of situations. His lack of knowledge -- usually a liability -- was turned instead into an asset ... because it pushed him to think creatively.

One of God's Greatest Gifts to us, I believe, is helping us learn how to Turn Liabilities Into Assets. In the very places where WE think we are Not Good Enough, Not Smart Enough, not Rich Enough ... or in terms of our Church, Oh we're just a small church, we don't have enough people or money ... In THOSE VERY SITUATIONS AND ATTITUDES God comes to us and says: "Let Me Help You Turn Your Liabilities Into Assets -- Where You See Weakness, Let Me Show You Astonishing Strength -- where You see Hopelessness, Let Me show you Great Possibilities!

In today's first Scripture reading we meet one of the most famous people in the Bible -- a woman named RUTH. Now how did Ruth get to be so famous and influential? Ruth had "4 Strikes Against Her" ... 4 Big Liabilities. First, she was a FOREIGNER -- an Alien who didn't have a Passport or a Travel Visa or a Green Card to make her legal. She came into Israel and settled in Bethlehem only by the good graces of her Mother-In-Law, Naomi. Secondly, Ruth was a GENTILE - a hated heathen ... a worshipper of false Gods and a practitioner of 'Abominations!' Third, Ruth was FEMALE - a Woman, living in a world dominated by men. And Fourth, she was a WIDOW, and in ancient cultures there was No Way for a widow to earn her own living.

Ruth has Four Major Liabilities ... Four strikes against her... BUT she also has Tremendous Assets! She has FAITH -- Faith in God, Faith in her dear Friend and Helper, Naomi, and Faith in herSELF. And together, God, Ruth and Naomi turn Ruth's Liabilities into Assets.

Naomi tells Ruth: "Look, we've got to provide for your well-being, so I have a plan." Naomi outlines the plan to Ruth, telling her to make herself as Attractive, Alluring and Enticing as Possible. (I know this sounds like a Soap Opera, but it's right here in the Bible.) Then Naomi tells Ruth where to find Naomi's cousin, BOAZ, at a time and circumstance when he will be Very Receptive to a Romantic Rendezvous. The Seductive Plan succeeds. Ruth and Boaz have their Romantic Rendezvous, and before you can say "Kiss Me Sweetheart on My Ruby Red Lips" 3 times really fast -- the 2 of them are married. Soon they give birth to a child, who will be the Grandfather of King David of Bethlehem.

Then many generations later, Ruth the Widow with 4 strikes against her, becomes the Great, Great, Great, Great, Grandmother of JESUS of Nazareth, born in Bethlehem. God helps us turn our Liabilities into ASSETS!

JUNIE: In today's Gospel Lesson Jesus has taken the disciples on a Field Trip! Jesus is teaching them a Surprising Lesson about Assets and Liabilities. First Jesus has them look at the Scribes -- some of the RELIGIOUS LEADERS or Big Wigs at that time. "See how they wear Expensive Clothing, and they sit in the Box Seats at the theater, or at the Head Table at the banquets.

You would think, said Jesus, that these people have many spiritual and material Assets. But they don't. Their assets turn into liabilities because these Scribes Don't Care About People! In fact, they Devour Widow's Houses -- which probably means they steal from Widow's. Jesus has nothing good to say about these religious leaders.

Then, in contrast, Jesus focuses the disciples' attention on a Poor WIDOW. She has come to the Temple Treasury, along with many others, to offer her Financial Gift to God. First, Jesus and the disciples silently watch as many Rich People put in Large amounts of money. But when the WIDOW moves forward, and they can see that she has only 2 Copper Coins -- each worth a Half-Penny. And Jesus amazes the disciples by saying: "Truly, this poor widow has put in MORE than all the others. For they have contributed from their abundance, while she, in her poverty, has given God everything she had, all she had to live on.

In other words, the Widow's financial poverty -- a Liability - is turned into a SPIRITUAL ASSET ... A SPIRITUAL TREASURE. The wealthy givers, says one commentator on this passage, have simply made a donation to the treasury. But the poor Widow, because of her Faith and Trust in God, has dedicated ALL of her Resources to God! She is Doing What She Can Do!

Like in one of my favorite bible stories, when a huge crowd is around a house where Jesus is Preaching and Healing inside, when the friends of a Paralyzed Person cannot get him inside to Jesus and wonder how can they Make a Way?

Creatively, they decide to "Raise the Roof" -- or more accurately, they Opened Up the Roof, and on a Stretcher with Ropes they lowered their friend through the opened Ceiling into the Presence of Jesus Christ. And I'll bet that Jesus Smiled from Ear to Ear at of their Ingenuity and their Boldness!

Just as I imagine Jesus might have felt when a Mayan Indian church in Guatemala made of banana leaves-on-poles as roof and bamboo walls invited us in as visitors from Hillsboro Presbyterian Church. Then there was no room for the rest of the Mayan villagers to come in to worship! What to do? Innovation again saved the day. They unlashd the back wall, removing it completely!

Because of their FAITH, Jesus came among them, then and now. Because of their FAITH, Jesus not only healed the Paralyzed Person, he also said, "YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN." FIRST Jesus gives us Spiritual Salvation. FIRST, Jesus meets our deepest Spiritual Needs. Then Jesus acted, telling the paralyzed man and us, "Arise, pick up your bed, your stretcher, and walk!"