

# still waters

home church studies

## Psalm 146

[Worship]

1 Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul! 2 I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long. 3 Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help. 4 When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish. 5 Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God, 6 who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; 7 who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free; 8 the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous. 9 The LORD watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. 10 The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD!

### Consider:

[Words]

Ruth is a book meant to be read in its entirety—Goethe called it the most beautiful "little whole" in the Old Testament. The whole story, told over four chapters, ought to be related as a piece rather than split into two parts as our lectionary stipulates.

It's remarkable that a narrative that radically overturns so many cultural mores became part of the canon. The people of Israel made a clear distinction between those who were God's people and those who were the "other," the foreigner. Yet the hero of this story is Ruth, a Moabite, who by the conclusion is shown to be the forebear not only of King

David but of Jesus himself. The story certainly illustrates a theme from today's psalm, "God protects the stranger"(146:9).

But welcoming the stranger isn't the most significant way that the story turns tradition on its head. The patriarchal order is clear: The value of a woman, even her identity, comes from her connection to a man. Naomi assumes her own worthlessness because she can provide no husband for her daughters-in-law (1:11). But Ruth rises above the ethos of her time. She is determined to stick with Naomi through thick and thin, abandoning her people, her country, even her god. Most commentators see this as loving kindness; "sisterhood" is perhaps a more apt description! Her pledge of commitment (1:16) echoes that found in the All Saints reading: "They will be his people, and God will be...their God" (Revelation 21:3).

God, through Boaz, rewards Ruth's loyalty. The writer, and subsequent commentators, casts this as a story of God's loving faithfulness, but as Jesus points out in the Mark passage, the love of God is intrinsically connected to love of our neighbors (Mark 12:28-31).

Because of Ruth's fidelity, and because she chose to accept and serve God, she was worth "more than seven sons"—extraordinary praise, even if we can't ignore the irony.



[Scripture]

## Hebrews 9.11-14

11 But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), 12 he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!