

# RADIX 11: COURAGEOUS ANCESTORS OF FAITH: RUTH & ESTHER

What do we do with lesser-known parts of the Bible? This sacred book is a rich and diverse collection of our ancestors' encounters with the Holy One. In the Episcopal tradition, we trust that the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Scriptures (the "Old" and "New" Testaments) are the Word of God because "God inspired their human authors and because God still speaks to us through the Bible" (BCP, p. 853). The Bible tells multiple stories of God's movement in history using a variety of literary styles—narrative story, poetry, letters, lyrical prose, law, and more.

In Radix 11, we will encounter two parts of the Hebrew Scriptures that may be unfamiliar to participants—the books of Ruth and Esther. They are the only two books in the Bible named for women<sup>1</sup> and each tells an important story of ancestry that we can claim as our own.

The book of Ruth is a relatively short parable about ordinary people—two widows named Naomi and Ruth and a farmer named Boaz—as they experience famine, exile, grief, and the desire for redemption and renewal. Ruth's commitment to and love for her mother-in-law Naomi is often read in marriage liturgies, "*Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God my God.*"

The book of Esther is a longer Jewish novella that involves extraordinary, dramatic, people—wealthy and powerful King Ahasuerus and Queen Vashti of Persia; evil Haman, responsible for a genocidal plot against the Jews; wise Mordecai, guardian of Esther; and Esther, a Jewish orphan

---

1. One other book named for a woman, Judith, is included in the Apocrypha.

who becomes Queen of Persia and saves her people from extermination. It is an over-the-top story of sudden, surprising reversals that established the Jewish holiday of Purim.

Ruth and Esther are revered ancestors of faith because their lives are critical to the lineage of David, and eventually Jesus. Both women navigate the culture of their time—a system in which a woman’s safety and power depends on her family connections and ability to influence the men in her life. Each also marries a man of a different religious background, which brings its own challenges. Their stories may stir up questions about our own culture and experiences of interracial and interreligious relationships, as well as what it means to leave a legacy for future generations.

Unlike other books in the Bible, the stories of Ruth and Esther make almost no mention of God’s presence and actions. They are faithful women, but any encounters they have with the Holy One take place off-camera, if at all. We are left to imagine the content and tenor of their spiritual lives and wonder at how their lives are intertwined with God’s movement in history. All of this leads us to consider how God speaks to us through the Bible and how our own mundane lives may be moving in the flow of God’s healing and redemptive love. ♦