

11.9.25 Sermon Transcript – Joshua 2:1-21

You know, a couple of years ago at annual conference, we had this call response that sometimes we've used at annual conference and the leader says, "God is good." And then the people say, "all the time." And then the leader says, "all the time, God is good. So let's try that. God is good. All the time. All the time. Absolutely. To me, that summarizes the story of Rahab. But as Paul Harvey, an old-time news person, would say, "Now for the rest of the story."

Rahab was married at 15 years of age in an arranged marriage in Jericho. She was very beautiful. She and her husband had no children, but he was addicted to gambling, spending away their money. He was an abuser, a drinker. Eventually he was brought up on charges of not paying his taxes to the prince of the territory. Now, Rahab's vocation was a maker of fine crimson cloth, like you see here at the pulpit here this morning for rich people, which she spent a lot of time working on even at such a young age. But she always, always had to turn over her money for making this cloth to her husband. Needless to say, he didn't work. But she did hide monies for emergencies. Now, her husband had much indebtedness to the prince to the point that he sold most of their household furniture. I mean, everything, even Rahab.

One night, her husband abused a man and he was thrown in jail. Rahab has a very soft heart for this family. And she takes her money and her valuables, whatever she has left, to bail everyone out, but to no avail. Rahab is arrested and both are planned to be auctioned off for her husband's non-payment of his taxes to the prince. And she kept saying over and over again, "I am a worthless piece of filth," to the point that she began to believe those words. She remains isolated, but available to men for the money. So eventually her husband was sold as a slave to the Syrians.

The prince bought Rahab, but she didn't grieve the loss of her husband. She grieved the loss of her freedom. The prince moved her into this wonderful, beautiful, palatial home with slaves to do the work inside the walls of Jericho. He definitely wants to control her. And she submits to his desires. Every time Rahab wants to run away, run from the despair, run from the pain or loneliness. Am I sinful? Am I a harlot? Why do I keep picking the wrong men, who are abusers and drinkers and gamblers?

As time went on, the prince's promises of the two of them together were forgotten and dismissed. And she continued her vocation as a prostitute for him, for the money. Now here's the sad news. We talked a little bit about this in Sunday school. Rahab's way of disassociating and numbing herself during this whole time was to drink poppy-laced tea just to disassociate herself.

Months later, Rahab thought she was pregnant. She didn't care who fathered the child. She just needed someone to love and to love her in return. Flesh of the flesh. She needed to keep this baby, but it was not meant to be. The prince confronted her about, aren't you getting fatter? Take care of that problem.

If you felt lonely and alone all the time, wouldn't you want someone to love and to be able to return that love? Rahab's prayers go unanswered. She hated herself.

Reading Scripture:

Then Joshua son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.” So they went and entered the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab and spent the night there. The king of Jericho was told, “Some Israelites have come here tonight to search out the land.” Then the king of Jericho sent orders to Rahab, “Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come to search out the whole land.” But the woman took the two men and hid them. Then she said, “True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they came from. And when it was time to close the gate at dark, the men went out. Where the men went I do not know. Pursue them quickly, for you can overtake them.” She had, however, brought them up to the roof and hidden them with the stalks of flax that she had laid out on the roof. So the men pursued them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords. As soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut.

Before they went to sleep, she came up to them on the roof and said to the men, “I know that the Lord has given you the land and that dread of you has fallen on us and that all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. As soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no courage left in any of us because of you. The Lord your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below. Now then, since I have dealt kindly with you, swear to me by the Lord that you in turn will deal kindly with my family. Give me a sign of good faith that you will spare my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them and deliver our lives from death.” The men said to her, “Our life for yours! If you do not tell this business of ours, then we will deal kindly and faithfully with you when the Lord gives us the land.”

Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the outer side of the city wall and she resided within the wall itself. She said to them, “Go toward the hill country, so that the pursuers may not come upon you. Hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers have returned; then afterward you may go your way.” The men said to her, “We will be released from this oath that you have made us swear to you if we invade the land and you do not tie this crimson cord in the window through which you let us down and you do not gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your family. If any of you go out of the doors of your house into the street, they shall be responsible for their own death, and we shall be innocent, but if a hand is laid upon any who are with you in the house, we shall bear the responsibility for their death. But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be released from this oath that you made us swear to you.” She said, “According to your words, so be it.” She sent them away, and they departed. Then she tied the crimson cord in the window.

Meanwhile, as we just heard Don read, over in Canaan, Joshua shares with his men about the goal to destroy Jericho because of their sinfulness. “We’re going to march around the city of Jericho seven times.” I’ve been thinking about that word “march” lately, and I know that some of you participated in a march a few weeks ago.

I have some deacon friends who decided to show up at the White House, and instead of standing in one place, they decided to walk or march around the building, voicing their concerns aloud to God. In this conversation and in conversational tones, my friend Jessica said that she found herself thinking about the biblical fall of Jericho, when God instructed the Israelite army to march around their enemy's city once a day for six days. I felt like I was walking around the walls of Jericho, waiting for God to work. As with Jericho, it will take time to dismantle an unjust system. So she said, I plan to do that prayer walk regularly on the Israelites seventh day circling Jericho. God made the city's defensive walls fall down.

Now, as Jessica said to me, "I didn't expect anything that dramatic to happen. Sometimes I wonder if it even makes sense to spend hours monthly circling this building. Couldn't I just pray from home?" I reminded Jessica of our vows of justice and compassion that we have taken. And I believe that she is doing the business of the human world taking on this because she has feelings and she has emotions for other people. Jessica prays because she needs God's help, especially in figuring out how to pray for the administration.

And now, as we heard back in Canaan, the chosen spies are sent to Jericho to blend in with the other merchants going into town. They arrive at Rahab's house to blend in and announce to her that they are Israelites. And they spend time talking about their God.

Can you just imagine Rahab, Rahab learning about this God who loves unconditionally, who listens to prayers, and who indeed she did hide the spies on her rooftop and the flax that's being dried. And she tells the guards, "They already left. They went that way!" They are chasing imaginary foes to the edge of the Jordan, because she protected them. She asks for their kindness and her family's protection. So one of the spies says to her, "If you don't tell what we're doing, we'll treat you kindly and faithfully when the Lord gives us this land."

She lets them down through an open window, using that scarlet rope to hold onto. She urges them to travel to the hills so not to be followed. Hide for three days and then go back to your home. And Rahab promised that she would tie a scarlet cord or rope in the window and encourages them to go in peace.

Does God hear the cries of this prostitute? After three days, the spies began the trek back to Joshua with a report and concurs that the Lord is in this place. "Let us overturn Jericho." So on the seventh day, Jericho is attacked by Joshua and his army. Rahab truly desires to obey, despise God, and proceeds to hang that crimson cord on the window. She is saved from the destruction of Jericho. Eventually, she sought Joshua's protection.

He was a great mentor for her through this time. And he became her shield from her pain and doubts. Now she was aware that Joshua was the leader, that he was humble and faithful. Have you ever had a mentor in your life? Have you ever had anybody like that?

Shirley Flynn was one of my mentors for my time, my situation, her filling my vessel with love, with information, with trust. She taught me how to be faithful and to be brave and to be tenacious.

Shirley was a trusted person to learn about the United Methodist Women, United Women in Faith now, and lots of United Methodist history. I relished that relationship with her. She was a person who encouraged belongingness.

Rahab says aloud that this God of Israel was beyond her understanding. Do I really belong with these people? She says that out loud. And it turns out that Eliana, who is Joshua's wife, overhears her. And she becomes that mentor for Rahab and begins to teach Rahab the ways of the Israelites, which are very strange to Rahab. Eliana tells her never lose hope and reminds her that nothing is impossible with our God. So never lose hope.

It was at this time that Rahab begins a time of personal spiritual formation to search for those hidden sins and confess them to God and to ask God for mercy and forgiveness. She loved walking at the Jordan river, to pray, to be silent, to be in connection with God. And as I studied about Rahab and I was looking at the Psalms, I wondered if Psalm 37 was on her heart in these times. If you get a chance, glance at it this week. But in reality, she does not feel worthy.

Is anyone worthy of forgiveness and mercy? She had so much self doubt and insecurity. Have you ever felt self doubt and insecurity? Have you ever felt unworthy when it comes to your relationship with God? Rahab's deepest desire is to know more about Joshua's God. And she wants to be clean and forgiven and to know this God. So Rahab cuts her hair to become a part of the Israelites. And one of the spies, Joshua's spies is named Salman. He enters her life. He definitely has a fondness for her and vice versa. Well, I'm not going to go on to that story, but I really like the fact that Rahab prayed daily at the Jordan river with salmon and that eventually marry. The sound of the river helped her to become clean. Salman reminds her to never underestimate the power of their God. A God who can topple Jericho's walls can also offer forgiveness. Morning time at the Jordan was their favorite time together. It was quiet, it was peaceful. It was time for their connection with God.

When do you connect with God? What's your best time when you connect with God? So what does Rahab say? To us today? What do we learn from her as an individual, as a church? I think there's four things that we can learn. Are there times that your prayers go unanswered? How do you handle that? In what ways have you been faithful to God, to this church, to this congregation? Have you been faithful? Do you have someone as a spiritual guide or a mentor to walk with you when you feel worthless? And lastly, are you tenacious in your desire to know God? Tenacious as Rahab was to intimately know God? Are you tenacious to learn about this?

And now for the completion of Rahab's story, as we find in Matthew, chapter one, verses one to six, the family tree of Jesus Christ. Abraham had Isaac, Isaac had Jacob, Jacob had Judah, and his brothers, Judah had Perez and Zerah. Their mother was Tamar. Perez had Hezron. Hezron had Aram. Aram had Amminadab, Amminadab had Nahshon. Nahshon had Salmon. Salmon had Boaz, whose mother was Rahab. Boaz had Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Obed had Jesse. Jesse had David. And David became King.
Amen.