

## Wise Women Leading the Way - Rahab's Story- *Joshua 2*

Norwalk Christian Church, January 12, 2020, Epiphany 2, Year A, Non-Lectionary Worship Series

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Her story is not one we tell much. Most of the sister stories in scripture we don't tell much. And like a lot of their stories, her story is filled with sex and scandal. It's hard to preach a sermon on her that isn't PG13, at best.

Perhaps that's why we avoid her story. Or sanitize it, a bit. There's a long history of Christian interpretation that suggests that she was but an innkeeper. But the Hebrew language does not support this interpretation. Wishful thinking, perhaps, but it's not in the text.

She was a prostitute, well, actually, a prostituted woman. We like to act like it was a career choice, but let's be honest. More often than not, women in that field are not there by choice. They are slaves, victims, or poor and have little to no way of earning a living. To call her a "prostitute" holds unaccountable those who forced her into this lifestyle. Prostituted women are owned by men, pimps--whose names, like in this story, usually goes unmentioned.

And, well, to be honest, usually the names of women like her go unmentioned, too. Usually. But the writer of the book of Joshua names her. Her name is Rahab. Rahab, which means *pride*. Pride is, literally, her name.

And throughout the story, you can see her name bleeding through to her character. Rahab lives on the edge of society, actually living inside the wall around the city. Her back is literally against the wall. Yet, in the midst of her situation in life, Rahab had found pride. She knew society deemed her as powerless, yet she knew that within her, she held power.

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That day, when two spies came to show up, she was aware of what was happening. See, on the beds of brothels powerful men tend to talk. They tell stories. Hey, have you heard of the large band of nomads wandering the wilderness, coming our way. People have been talking and Rahab has been listening.

When these two men show up, she's ready for them.

We're stepping into this mid-story. Here's what you need to know. In last week's episode, Moses died. The Israelites had been wandering around in the Wilderness after escaping Egypt for 40 years. Now Joshua was in charge, and he led the people to cross a miraculously parted Jordan River. And they were headed right for the city of Jericho.

This week, Joshua sends in two spies to check things out. They are to survey the defenses, find points of weakness, and report back what they find. But what do they do instead? They head straight for the brothel hidden in the wall. And why?

Why do you think men who just arrived in the big city after wandering the countryside for years head to the brothel? This isn't on the intel mission agenda. They've got other things in mind.

The Hebrew language is, like it often is, intentionally ambiguous here. It literally says, "They lay there." But that Hebrew word has other connotations. They lay there for pleasure, two more men--these two claiming to be holy--taking advantage of Rahab and her sisters. They never ask her any questions. She tells them who she thinks they are, and that the cityfolk are scared of this band of wandering Hebrews.

She mentions the Lord, not them. "I know that the Lord has given you the land," she says. And I know "The Lord your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below."

She knows what's about to happen. She knows the power of the Lord. And she realizes--she has an opportunity for salvation. She's pragmatic. So she cuts a deal.

She seems to have little concern for the rest of her town. On the edge of society, with her back against the wall, she's seen it all. Perhaps she thinks they have it coming.

But her family. Her mother. Her father. Her brothers. And, especially her sisters--these she will fight for.

"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."

And they respond, "Our life for yours! ... If...if you don't tell this business of ours, then we will deal kindly and faithfully with you when the LORD gives us this land."

Now, it could be they didn't want her blabbing about what they were about to do. And it could be that they didn't want her blabbing when she's back in the camp what they had just done...probably some of both.

And Rahab agrees. She devises the plan. Sends the spies to hide. Ties a crimson cord outside her window. And saves her life, her family's lives, and the spies.

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This isn't Jacob having a dream or Moses hearing a call from a burning bush. This isn't little boy David being anointed king or Isaiah being interrupted by an angel while performing his priestly duties.

This is a wise woman. A woman who didn't have opportunity fall into her lap. No dreams. No angels. No voices from God. Just a woman on the edge of society, whose back was against the wall. But she knew the Lord and when the chance came, she tied a crimson cord from that wall, and climbed out of her situation.

What's the rest of Rahab's story? Rahab was saved. The walls around her life fell down with the walls of Jericho, and she leaves her previous life and becomes one of the Israelites. And one day, we are told, Rahab has a baby boy, and names him Boaz. One day that Baby Boy grows up and has considerable wealth. And he meets a widow, another foreign woman on the edge of society much like his mother. That woman was named Ruth, and she has an entire book in scripture that tells her story. She has a son, too, named Obed. Who has a son named Jesse. Who has a son named King David, who's great, great, great grandmother's name was Pride.

One day, many years from those events, a man named Matthew sits down and writes another story. It's Good News, he calls it, about Jesus, the Son of God. And when he begins his story, he draws a line from this Son of God all the way through Jewish history, back to Abraham and Isaac, Judah and Boaz. And Matthew names her, the mother of Boaz, Rahab.

Rahab, the prostituted woman from Jericho, saved by her wisdom, her pragmatism, her pride, and her Lord, the God of the Hebrew slaves AND the God of foreign women like Rahab and Ruth.

And then, Matthew tells the story of the one who stood with the oppressed, who dined with prostituted women and tax collectors, who ate and drank with sinners. And it makes you wonder, did he grow up hearing from his mother, a woman with her own questionable backstory, and hear the story of the wise women who led the way in his family, who trusted in God and risked it all. I wonder if he heard the story of Rahab, a grandmother of Jesus.

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Stories of faithful, fabulous woman are often not told, their lives overshadowed by the men who had more power and attention. But their stories are everywhere.

They show us the way of faith. For following God isn't about sitting back and waiting for something to fall in our laps. Following God means you get your back off the wall and climb down it.

Following God means you stand up to your oppressors. You fight for justice and your family. You have pride in yourself, even when no one else does. Following God means you don't sit in the back of the bus, and you cross the desert, river, or sea if it means protecting your family. You work one job and two and more--whatever you need to put food on the table.

Because you believe something, something no one else may believe about you: that you are worthy. That you are good. That you are, indeed, beloved by God.

And following God, means you follow in the example of his son, who saw the forgotten women in his world, and treated them with dignity and respect. No matter what others called them, he knew their name was Pride.

Aren't you glad Rahab is one of Jesus' grandmothers? For this story of Jesus is not only his story, it's her story, too. And it's our story. For the gospel proclaims that no matter who you are, no matter where in society you find yourself, no matter what others say about you, or what you've done--willingly or unwillingly--there is nothing in heaven or earth that can keep you from God's grace.

And you, like Rahab, can find your place in the family of Jesus. For we are all family of Jesus. And we are all called to take our place at the table--seated with the sinners and prostituted people of our world. And we are called to stand up with pride--no matter our past--so that God can use us.

Rahab's good news is that no matter your past, you can live with pride and you can be used by God.