

## Heroes of the Faith – 2. Rahab

Joshua 2:1-14

July 30, 2023

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This morning we continue our series, Heroes of the Faith, exploring the stories and lives of four women in scripture who teach us something about being courageous and bold in faith. Like last week, today's story is rarely taught in Sunday school. The name of our heroine, Rahab, is not a name with which many people are familiar. You could sit in church every Sunday of your life and make it all the way to your funeral without hearing about her. Fortunately for you today, that won't be true! And I hope that learning Rahab's story will make an impact on your faith, too.

As I've been reading and studying her story – I've realized that *a lot* of people don't quite know what to do with Rahab. They tend to focus on certain surface elements: like zeroing in on her occupation or reduce her story to a one-liner lesson in morality and trusting God. But if we are to honor Rahab's life and legacy, then we need to take a deep dive into her story, immersing ourselves in the layers of richness and tradition and beauty that lie within it.

The story takes place in the book of Joshua, which tells the story of the Hebrew people in the time after Moses. They have wandered the desert for 40 years and are now entering the Promised Land. The center city of this story is Jericho, which is where Rahab and our story today take place.

Jericho was accustomed to a lot of conflict and violence. Because of this, it was walled for protection, with the walls being several stories high. Commonly, the top of these walls was flat, providing a rooftop space for people to dry out their food and do other food-processing activities.

The Hebrew people were gathering around the outside walls of Jericho, preparing to invade it, because Jericho was the first city in the promised land. 40 years prior, they had reached it, with Moses as their leader, in order to evaluate if they could enter the land. Most of the leaders at that time were against it—they viewed it as a suicide mission for they would surely be killed if they did. So instead, they went back to Egypt.

But now, under the leadership of Joshua, they are back and trying to gain information about if they could take the city without all dying. What are their chances for taking over the city this time? And, critically, how would they gather the information and intelligence to discern their next steps? They decide to send spies into the city.

Here is where Rahab enters the scene. She is the main character of the story, the heroine. We know this early on, because she is named specifically, while the spies are not. While this isn't a guarantee in ancient texts, having been named is a helpful hint to us, as readers, that Rahab will be a significant part of the story.

Rahab is the focus, our main character. We are meant to pay attention to her actions, rather than that of the spies, the King, or other "supporting characters." As we are introduced to Rahab, and several times throughout her story, she is identified as a *harlot* or a *prostitute*. Some people spend a great deal of time focusing on the morality of her profession, and others wonder if this is an inaccurate title, and instead she is simply an inn keeper or business owner.

Yet – this is not a story solely about her profession, it is a story about her faith and courage to save the Jewish people. She lived in the city of Jericho around 1250 BCE. Her home would have been around 10 feet by 12 feet and built into the wall of the city. But as a result of her profession, she is an excellent source of information – as she meets many people, especially foreigners, who come in and out of her place. And they do so, without raising any suspicion.

Rahab's profession, while not the focus of her story, is an asset to what's coming, because it allows her to have conversations and access with the spies without anyone raising an eyebrow. The two spies knock on her door and head inside. The text is ambiguous if they just talk or if something else is happening. Rahab knows

quite a bit and informs them of what to do so that the land can be theirs.

When there is another knock on her door, she quickly sends them up to her rooftop where they can hide. Next, she goes to the door to find two of the king's men looking for the men on her roof. Here, Rahab is given a choice: she can honor the request of the King, or she can protect the spies and endanger her own life. She chooses the latter, and tells the King's men that the spies have left for the city, sending them off in a faulty direction.

After they leave, Rahab returns to the spies to help them escape. But first, she negotiates her own safety and the safety of her own family. Because she has saved their lives, they should save hers. Because Rahab has acted with courage and mercy, she pleads for them to act with mercy, too.

Several weeks later, Joshua's men enter the city and it's a bloody mess. Total madness and mayhem everywhere, but remembering Rahab's courage, Joshua sends the spies back to Rahab to help her and her family escape. We're told that she and her family has lived in Israel ever since, thanks to her willingness to hide the spies that Joshua sent to Jericho.

This story has rightfully earned Rahab a place in history. In the Jewish tradition, she is remembered as a great convert to Judaism and honored as an ancestress of kings and prophets. According to the Talmud in the Jewish faith, she went on to marry Joshua. In the Christian tradition, she is mentioned in Matthew as being married to a Jewish leader, the mother of Boaz, and having a place in the genealogy of Jesus.

What emerges in both traditions is a woman who was to be admired, remembered, and honored for who she was and what she did. Rahab was an outsider and triply marginalized: she was a woman, she was a Canaanite and not an Israeli, and she was a prostitute. All of these attributes were seen as strikes against her; aspects of her life that took power away from her.

Yet her faith in God and courageous act to save the lives of Israel helped her reclaim her power. She was an outsider who saved God's people. She helped secure a whole nation when she could have easily kept her head down and done nothing – which would have led to harm for the spies, Joshua, and the Israelites.

In contrast to the spies, who save her life at no risk to themselves, she saves their lives at great risk. This is what makes her a heroine. While many would judge her and say she has questionable standards at the beginning of the story, based only on what they know of her occupation, she is the one who enables the Israelites to enter the promised land. By the end of her life, she had found redemption for herself and earned a place in history. Her story is one of redemption for herself then as well as others.

As I reflect on this story, I'm aware that in every situation of oppression and marginalization, the changing to systems happens because of a brave few who risk their own lives and reputations for the good of others. Rahab was courageous and bold in faith, not only risking her own life but extending mercy to those who were undeserving. Perhaps because of her own marginalized place, she was moved to act with bravery to support the redemption of others.

One of the practices that I've been learning about in the last few years is the act of centering marginalized voices. In a nutshell, it means that you don't talk about or make decisions on issues without prioritizing the perspectives and voices of those who the issue affects the most. We don't make up our minds about racism without hearing from people of color. We don't make up our minds about homelessness without hearing from people who experience homelessness themselves. We don't make up our own story about adoption without hearing from people who have been adopted.

This is a difficult thing to do because it's hard for us to not center ourselves, our own experiences and feelings, our own comfort above others. It requires an open heart and bravery on our own part to seek out and lift up the voices and experiences of others. Yet when we do, we help create the peaceable and just kingdom of God.

There are many ways to work towards centering marginalized voices: We can listen and learn from those who are marginalized. Read their books, follow them on social media, watch their videos, trust their experience,

even when it's not the same as ours. We can turn to them for leadership and follow in their stead when trying to bring about change. We don't need to tell them what to do; instead, we can ask what resources would help them and then provide them.

The story of Rahab in Joshua is a perfect example of what it means to center the marginalized voice. The story is centered on Rahab. There were of course others who had perspectives on that time – but scripture focuses on the experience of Rahab. We hear of her courage, her faith, her mercy... all of which result in Joshua and the Israelites finding their lasting home in the Promised Land.

This was an intentional choice to center her story, and to ground her words as truth. Scripture values her experience. The spies, who are unnamed, share her words with the military leaders. They do not share their own experience or what they saw for themselves—they report back her words. When she negotiates with them, they follow her lead. The conclusion of the story celebrates Rahab, not the spies who protected her life.

This reminds us, yet again, that God stands with those who are most unlikely, who are marginalized and oppressed. And that through the centering of their stories, the liberation of their experiences, we find God at work. This doesn't mean that the other characters don't matter, or their perspectives aren't valued ones. But it is an example of what it means to center marginalized voices—to give them power and allow them to shape us and guide us first and foremost. And it stands as a reminder, that God is at work in the lives of all people: those without status or voice, those even outside religious experience or practice, those who we least expect. God is at work through all people, to bring about the redemption of God's people.

Rahab is also a story of a powerful woman who believed in her God. She teaches us a lot about what it means to risk for the sake of something greater than yourself. Rahab reveals to us what it looks like to use the power of your voice. And she reminds us of the importance of looking for the stories of the marginalized, listening to what they have to say to us, and following in their footsteps, where we are brought closer to God and God's mission.

Without Rahab's story, the story of God working in the lives of the people of Israel would be missing a huge piece. Her story plays a pivotal part in the timeline and landscape of God's work in this world.

As we continue to carry the story of God in our lives and actions, may we be inspired by Rahab's story. May her life give *us* courage to protect those who are vulnerable, to stand up and speak out against oppression, and to trust that God is at work through us in ways we cannot yet name or understand.

People of God, may this story encourage us to seek out the voices of those who are marginalized—the sex workers, the homeless, the disabled, the neuro-divergent, the transgender, the poor, the young and the old. May we trust their experiences and see the fullness of who they are and what they have to offer. May their boldness bring us more wisdom. May they shine in the center of their stories and reveal to us the goodness of God at work in our lives and world.

Beloved ones, may the courage and legacy of Rahab, shown through her mercy, her bravery, and her compassion, be alive in your hearts and world. Let us pray: O God who calls us to take risks, give us the courage of Rahab as we continue to seek after your call. Be with us as we go forth into a new week full of opportunities to love you, to love our neighbor, and to make an impact in your world. May our hearts continue to be open to your presence and work around us. Amen.

## **Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of July 30, 2023**

### **Weekly Prayer**

O God who calls us to take risks, give me the courage of Rahab as I continue to seek after your call. Be with me throughout this week, help me to be bold, courageous, and merciful. Keep me open to your presence and work around us. Amen.

**Monday July 31**

**Scripture: Joshua 1:1-18**

After Moses the Lord's servant died, the Lord spoke to Joshua, Nun's son. He had been Moses' helper. "My servant Moses is dead. Now get ready to cross over the Jordan with this entire people to the land that I am going to give to the Israelites. I am giving you every place where you set foot, exactly as I promised Moses. Your territory will stretch from the desert and the Lebanon as far as the great Euphrates River, including all Hittite land, up to the Mediterranean Sea on the west. No one will be able to stand up against you during your lifetime. I will be with you in the same way I was with Moses. I won't desert you or leave you. Be brave and strong, because you are the one who will help this people take possession of the land, which I pledged to give to their ancestors. "Be very brave and strong as you carefully obey all of the Instruction that Moses my servant commanded you. Don't deviate even a bit from it, either to the right or left. Then you will have success wherever you go. Never stop speaking about this Instruction scroll. Recite it day and night so you can carefully obey everything written in it. Then you will accomplish your objectives and you will succeed. I've commanded you to be brave and strong, haven't I? Don't be alarmed or terrified, because the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." Then Joshua gave orders to the people's officers: "Go through the camp and give orders to the people. Say, 'Get supplies ready for yourselves because in three days you will be crossing over the Jordan to enter the land and take it over. The Lord your God is going to give it to you as your possession.'" Then Joshua addressed the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh: "Remember the command that Moses the Lord's servant gave you: 'The Lord your God will give you rest and give you this land.' Your wives, children, and cattle may remain in the land that Moses has given you on the east side of the Jordan. But all you brave fighters, organized for war, must cross over in front of your fellow Israelites. You must help them until the Lord gives a rest like yours to your fellow Israelites and they too take possession of the land that the Lord your God is giving them. Then you may return and take over the land that belongs to you, which Moses the Lord's servant has given you on the east side of the Jordan." They answered Joshua, "We will obey everything you have commanded us and go anywhere you send us. We will obey you in the same way that we obeyed Moses. Just let the Lord your God be with you as he was with Moses! Anybody who stubbornly opposes what you declare and doesn't obey any of your commands will be put to death. Be brave and strong!"

**OBSERVATION**

The book of Judges begins after Moses' death and tells us the beginning of the "next" chapter. Joshua is guiding the people to the land God promised. The chapter ends with a response from the people - giving us a clue of what to expect in pages to come: "Everything you commanded us, we'll do. Wherever you send us, we'll go... Anyone who questions what you say and refuses to obey whatever you command him will be put to death. Strength! Courage!"

The future is yet uncertain, but two things are named: The people will go with God, and they will carry strength and courage with them.

**APPLICATION**

*"Courage is the most important of all the virtues because without courage, you can't practice any other virtue consistently."* - Maya Angelou Do you consider yourself a courageous person? I learned recently about "everyday courage," which is a way of living that is adaptable, honest, and faithful. It means to show courage by: (1) standing up when an injustice occurs or others are treated unfairly, (2) remaining steadfast in the face of challenges or failures, (3) challenging previously held assumptions and being open to learning new things, and (4) acknowledging personal bias and being open to growing in understanding of others. How have you shown everyday courage today?

**PRAYER**

God, help me to show everyday courage. Remind me that living authentically in you requires daily strength and confidence that you abundantly provide. Amen.

**Tuesday, August 1**

**Scripture: Joshua 2:1-14**

Joshua, Nun's son, secretly sent two men as spies from Shittim. He said, "Go. Look over the land, especially Jericho." They set out and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab. They bedded down there. Someone told the king of Jericho, "Men from the Israelites have come here tonight to spy on the land." So the king of Jericho sent word to Rahab: "Send out the men who came to you, the ones who came to your house, because they have come to spy on the entire land." But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. Then she said, "Of course the men came to me. But I didn't know where they were from. The men left when it was time to close the gate at dark, but I don't know where the men went. Hurry! Chase after them! You might catch up with them." But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the flax stalks that she had laid out on the roof. The men from Jericho chased after them in the direction of the Jordan up to the fords. As soon as those chasing them went out, the gate was shut behind them. Before the spies bedded down, Rahab went up to them on the roof. She said to the men, "I know that the Lord has given you the land. Terror over you has overwhelmed us. The entire population of the land has melted down in fear because of you. We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Reed Sea in front of you when you left Egypt. We have also heard what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites on the other side of the Jordan. You utterly wiped them out. We heard this and our hearts turned to water. Because of you, people can no longer work up their courage. This is because the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on earth below. Now, I have been loyal to you. So pledge to me by the Lord that you in turn will deal loyally with my family. Give me a sign of good faith. Spare the lives of my father, mother, brothers, and sisters, along with everything they own. Rescue us from death." The men said to her, "We swear by our own lives to secure yours. If you don't reveal our mission, we will deal loyally and faithfully with you when the Lord gives us the land."

**OBSERVATION**

Joshua sends spies out ahead, but the King of Jericho learns of them. The King learns that they are staying in the home of Rahab and directs her to reveal the spies. Instead, Rahab hides them and helps them flee.

**APPLICATION**

This reminds me of the story of the Magi, after Jesus' birth. They too, acted in ways counter to the orders of the King. And in doing so, they aided the people of God in securing their lives and freedom. God invites us to be bold in our living, especially in our care of others. The actions of Rahab and the Magi both protected the lives of others at risk to themselves. How might God be calling you to take a risk, so that others might be protected?

**PRAYER**

God, you call me to be bold and courageous in following you. Help make my love of you and neighbor stronger than my fears. Give me opportunities today to practice being bold in faith. Amen.

**Wednesday. August 2**

**Scripture: Joshua 6:17-27**

The city and everything in it is to be utterly wiped out as something reserved for the Lord. Only Rahab the prostitute is to stay alive, along with everyone with her in her house. This is because she hid the messengers we sent. But you, keep away from the things set aside for God so that you don't desire and take some of the things reserved. That would turn the camp of Israel into a thing doomed to be utterly wiped out and bring calamity on it. All silver and gold, along with bronze and iron equipment, are holy to the Lord. They must go into the Lord's treasury." Then the people shouted. They blew the trumpets. As soon as the people heard the trumpet blast, they shouted a loud war cry. Then the wall collapsed. The people went up against the city, attacking straight ahead. They captured the city. Without mercy, they wiped out everything in the city as something reserved for God—man and woman, young and old, cattle, sheep, and donkeys. Joshua spoke to the two men who had scouted out the land. "Go to the prostitute's house. Bring out the woman from there, along with everyone related to her, exactly as you pledged to her." So the young men who had been spies went and brought Rahab out, along with her father, her mother, her brothers, and everyone related to her. They brought her whole clan out and let them stay outside Israel's camp. They burned the city and everything in it. But they put the silver and gold, along with the bronze and iron equipment, into the treasury of the Lord's house. Joshua let Rahab the prostitute live, her family, and everyone related to her. So her family still lives

among Israel today, because she hid the spies whom Joshua had sent to scout out Jericho. At that time Joshua made this decree:

“Anyone who starts to rebuild this city of Jericho will be cursed before the Lord. Laying its foundations will cost them their oldest child. Setting up its gates will cost them their youngest child.” The Lord was with Joshua. News about him spread throughout the land.

### **OBSERVATION**

Skipping ahead a few chapters, we read that Joshua has returned to Jericho and God is helping them overtake the city. But remembering what had happened earlier, Joshua sends the spies inside to rescue Rahab and her family. They stayed true to their word.

### **APPLICATION**

I'm remembering the quote from Maya Angelou earlier this week — that courage is what makes every other virtue possible. Because of Rahab's courage, Joshua and his spies are responding with courage and mercy of their own. When last were you a recipient of another's courage or mercy? How did that feel?

### **PRAYER**

Almighty God, you surround us every day with opportunities to practice loving our neighbor. Sometimes, this looks like courage and mercy. Thank you for these gifts, and for the people that embody them to us. Amen.

## **Thursday, August 3**

### **Scripture: Matthew 1:1-17**

A record of the ancestors of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac. Isaac was the father of Jacob. Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar. Perez was the father of Hezron. Hezron was the father of Aram. Aram was the father of Amminadab. Amminadab was the father of Nahshon. Nahshon was the father of Salmon. Salmon was the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab. Boaz was the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Obed was the father of Jesse. Jesse was the father of David the king. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been the wife of Uriah. Solomon was the father of Rehoboam. Rehoboam was the father of Abijah. Abijah was the father of Asaph. Asaph was the father of Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat was the father of Joram. Joram was the father of Uzziah. Uzziah was the father of Jotham. Jotham was the father of Ahaz. Ahaz was the father of Hezekiah. Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh. Manasseh was the father of Amos. Amos was the father of Josiah. Josiah was the father of Jechoniah and his brothers. This was at the time of the exile to Babylon. After the exile to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel. Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud. Abiud was the father of Eliakim. Eliakim was the father of Azor. Azor was the father of Zadok. Zadok was the father of Achim. Achim was the father of Eliud. Eliud was the father of Eleazar. Eleazar was the father of Matthan. Matthan was the father of Jacob. Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary—of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Christ. So there were fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen generations from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen generations from the exile to Babylon to the Christ.

### **OBSERVATION**

Reading genealogies might not be your favorite past time. But did you notice this: Rahab is one of four women included in the genealogy of Jesus. Why do you think Matthew included her? What is the significance of her inclusion?

### **APPLICATION**

One thing we might learn is this: Rahab acted in ways that were brave and potentially costly to her life. She could have easily followed her King's orders and revealed the spies. Instead, she acted in ways that not only saved them — but eventually would be part of the family tree that brought us Jesus. Perhaps God is reminding us, that it is by our courage, our mercy, and care of others - that the redemption of God is revealed. And also this: never underestimate how God will be at work in and through you!

### **PRAYER**

God, thank you for the generations of people who have gone before. For ancestors of faith in scripture, and in my own life. Help me to celebrate and honor them today. Be at work in my life, just the same, that future generations will know your mercy and grace. Amen.

**Friday, August 4**

**Scripture: Hebrews 11:31-40**

By faith Rahab the prostitute wasn't killed with the disobedient because she welcomed the spies in peace. What more can I say? I would run out of time if I told you about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets. Through faith they conquered kingdoms, brought about justice, realized promises, shut the mouths of lions, put out raging fires, escaped from the edge of the sword, found strength in weakness, were mighty in war, and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured and refused to be released so they could gain a better resurrection. But others experienced public shame by being taunted and whipped; they were even put in chains and in prison. They were stoned to death, they were cut in two, and they died by being murdered with swords. They went around wearing the skins of sheep and goats, needy, oppressed, and mistreated. The world didn't deserve them. They wandered around in deserts, mountains, caves, and holes in the ground. All these people didn't receive what was promised, though they were given approval for their faith. God provided something better for us so they wouldn't be made perfect without us.

**OBSERVATION**

"By an act of faith, Rahab welcomed spies and escaped the destruction of those who refused to trust God." That's quite an opener! By faith, God gives us the courage to do great and hard things! They are not always the things applauded by political or societal norms of the day. And yet, as Rev. Dr Martin Luther King Jr said, "the arc of the moral universe is long but bends towards justice." When we act in the ways of God, we partner with God to bring about God's kingdom here on earth.

**APPLICATION**

What acts of courage, by yourself or others, have made an impact in your life? Throughout history, it has been by the courageous acts of people, who have led the way toward a more inclusive and just future. Give thanks for that, today! And consider this: what action might you take today, that brings about a glimpse of God's peaceful, inclusive kingdom on earth?

**PRAYER**

God of justice and peace, give me courage today. Guide my living to be one that embodies your love of neighbor and seeks to make a positive impact in the world. Amen.

**Saturday, August 5**

**Scripture: James 2:14-26**

My brothers and sisters, what good is it if people say they have faith but do nothing to show it? Claiming to have faith can't save anyone, can it? Imagine a brother or sister who is naked and never has enough food to eat. What if one of you said, "Go in peace! Stay warm! Have a nice meal!"? What good is it if you don't actually give them what their body needs? In the same way, faith is dead when it doesn't result in faithful activity. Someone might claim, "You have faith and I have action." But how can I see your faith apart from your actions? Instead, I'll show you my faith by putting it into practice in faithful action. It's good that you believe that God is one. Ha! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble with fear. Are you so slow? Do you need to be shown that faith without actions has no value at all? What about Abraham, our father? Wasn't he shown to be righteous through his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? See, his faith was at work along with his actions. In fact, his faith was made complete by his faithful actions. So the scripture was fulfilled that says, *Abraham believed God, and God regarded him as righteous*. What is more, Abraham was called God's friend. So you see that a person is shown to be righteous through faithful actions and not through faith alone. In the same way, wasn't Rahab the prostitute shown to be righteous when she received the messengers as her guests and then sent them on by another road? As the lifeless body is dead, so faith without actions is dead.

**OBSERVATION**

The book of James focuses on the practical side of faith, answering the question: If we believe, how do we live and act? In this passage, James couples' faith with action, telling us: "faith and works, works and faith, fit together hand in glove" (v 18).

**APPLICATION**

How does your faith "fit together hand in glove" with the actions of your life? How is your living - your work and play, words, and actions - an embodiment of your faith in Jesus Christ?

**PRAYER**

God of all creation, thank you for daily showing up for me. Thank you for your redeeming love in Jesus. Help me to follow you more closely today, so that my faith is put into action. Guide me, that my faith and actions "fit together hand in glove." Amen.