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Joshua 2:1-24 & 6:22-25
Women of the Hebrew Scriptures: Rahab
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Joshua 2:1-24 & 6:22-25

¹Then 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. ²The king of Jericho was told, “Some Israelites have come here tonight to search out the land.” ³Then 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 only to search out the whole land.” ⁴But 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. ⁵And 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.” ⁶She had, however, brought them up to the roof and hidden them with the stalks of flax that she had laid out on the roof. ⁷So 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. ⁸Before they went to sleep, she came up to them on the roof ⁹and 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. ¹⁰For 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 that were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. ¹¹As 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. ¹²Now 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 ¹³that you will spare my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.” ¹⁴The 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.” ¹⁵Then 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. ¹⁶She 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.”¹⁷The men said to her,

“We will be released from this oath that you have **made** us swear to you ¹⁸if 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. ¹⁹If 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. ²⁰But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be released from this oath that you **made** us swear to you.” ²¹She said, “According to your words, so be it.” She sent them away and they departed. Then she tied the crimson cord in the window. ²²They departed and went into the hill country and stayed there three days, until the pursuers returned. The pursuers had searched all along the way and found nothing. ²³Then the two men came down again from the hill country. They crossed over, came to Joshua son of Nun, and told him all that had happened to them. ²⁴They said to Joshua, “Truly the Lord has given all the land into our hands; more over all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before us.”

*Our story speeds ahead to chapter 6. The Hebrew people have invaded and the powerful **walled** city of Jericho has fallen – that crimson cord had done its job.*

Chapter 6:22-25

²²Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, “Go into the prostitute’s house, and bring the woman out of it and all who belong to her, as you swore to her.” ²³So the young men who had been spies went in and brought Rahab out, along with her father, her mother, her brothers, and all who belonged to her — they brought all her kindred out — and set them outside the camp of Israel. ²⁴They burned down the city, and everything in it; only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord. ²⁵But Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, Joshua spared. Her family has lived in Israel ever since. For she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho

Friends, this the Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

“The Women of the Hebrew Scriptures: Rahab”

They crept through the town, always watching for anyone who might be staring at them for too long, always looking for opportunities, entry points, ways they could continue to go unnoticed in hostile city. They made their way through streets crowded with people uneasy and afraid about the gathering power that is amassing against them. They come to a place where they

think they can get information because now the powers that be in the city know they are there. They enter and are greeted by the owner of the establishment – a woman famous for her experience in her profession. This woman quickly hides them and helps them on their way.

I am, of course, describing a scene from the third book in the Hunger Games series when Katniss Everdeen and her fellow champions and rebels have entered the Capital in an attempt to bring down President Snow and his repressive regime.

This scene from the Hunger Games juggernaut does sound pretty familiar though, doesn't it? Like it could have been ripped from the pages of the book of Joshua?

Our story about Rahab comes at a pivotal time in the story of the Hebrew people. Moses has died, Joshua has taken over as the leader of the people and the Hebrews are about to cross over the Jordan river into the Promised Land. In preparation for this journey, Joshua has sent spies into Jericho, the fabled walled city whose defenses are supposed to be legendary.

These two spies enter Jericho and head straight for the house of Rahab, a prostitute. I have always thought that was the strangest decision – so much for the spy game. But then I watched the Game of Thrones series and it made more sense. The women in that profession would be visited by a broad cross section of the city's inhabitants – the rich, the poor, government officials and ordinary citizens – these women would hear the details on everything – they would know secrets and how people are really thinking about things. In addition, no one would spend too much time looking at who was coming and going from such an establishment so two guys looking to gather information might not be noticed.

Of course, that is not how things play out. Word spreads quickly to the King of Jericho that these spies are in the city and they are at Rahab's establishment.

But Rahab is SMART. She has been listening, she knows the pulse of the city - the men of Jericho have been talking about the power of

God who guides the chosen people amassed at the Jordan River. Rahab knows what it means that these strangers are at her door – she recognizes who they represent. In them, she sees the God of the Hebrew people approaching and she wasted no time taking action.

She hides them – in what I imagine is the most thrilling action sequence, Rahab tells the men to quietly and quickly make their way to the roof and covers them with the flax that will one day be used to create the linen thread of her garments. Just as the men are hidden, there comes the knock on her door – the king's guard had come to capture the men and bring them to the king so they could be tortured. But Rahab being a superb actress says, “Oh, that's who those guys were? You heard right - there were two strangers here, but I didn't know where they came from. You missed them - they are not here anymore. I don't know where they went, but I know they left the city just as the gate was closing. Quick, if you hurry I bet you can overtake them.”

Up on the roof, under all that flax, the two Israelites were probably sweating for fear of being discovered. Will the woman betray them? What is she saying to them? Are those steps coming our way? What is happening? Why is she helping us anyway?

I would guess that many of us are asking the same thing. Why would this woman of Jericho offer to help the Israelites? Why would this prostitute, who is literally living on the margins of society, risk everything to help these two Israelite spies?

After the guard left to pursue them, Rahab returns to the roof and lays all her cards on the table. “I knew exactly who you were as soon as you came here.” I have heard the stories of your God's power...I know your God has promised you this land on which we are living...The people of this city pretend to be brave, but I know their fear of your God will melt their hearts and courage.

At first her explanation sounds like the words of a SMART woman, who is a survivor. She understands the power that is about to fall upon the city and she wants to place herself on the right side of that power.

But I think these stories have worked their way through her brain into Rahab's heart too. She heard the story of this people who once lived in slavery and who were guided through the Red Sea by the power of God. In recognizing the power of the God of the Israelites, she recognizes her own story – the story of God acting on behalf of those who were outcast and on the margins, those who lived at the whims of those in power, those who have no other hope than to rely on God's grace. I believe this recognition inspired hope – hope that maybe she could know this God too, that maybe this God already knows her.

“The Lord your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below.” (vs. 11b)

Ever the smart businesswoman, she negotiates for special consideration – she wants a place in the future with God's people. Rahab risks everything – her very life and the lives of her family members – to help these Israelite spies. She guides them to the hills to avoid the king's guard on the roads.

I kinda love that AFTER the Israelites have made this promise and she has helped them scale down the city wall that they then try to put stipulations on the agreement. “if you don't put that cord in your window and if you don't have your family in your house, then the outcome is on you.” Shouting up from the bottom of the wall to Rahab in her window.

Rahab is good to her word – she abides by every detail of the agreement. She holds her tongue, she hangs that cord out her window and she keeps her family close.

In the same way, the spies return to Joshua. I imagine they tell a daring tale of their escape from Jericho, but when it comes to describing Jericho they quote Rahab - *“Truly the Lord has given all the land into our hands; more over all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before us.”*

The book of Joshua continues and there are glorious battles and demonstrations of God's power – the walls of Jericho fall and the city is burned. BUT before that happens, like in Egypt, the wrath of God's power passes over Rahab because she followed the instructions, marking her window with the red cord. The allusions to Passover are striking to me. In Egypt it was the red blood of the lamb, in Joshua it is the red cord.

Recognizing her faithfulness, God's power passes over her home and her people were spared and she is led out of harms way.

The story of Rahab is remarkable – it is exciting and action packed, so much so that it is easy to miss the fact that there are only two NAMED characters. Joshua – the newly minted leader of the Israelites. The two Israelite spies are not named...the king of Jericho is not named...Rahab – the prostitute of Jericho is the only other named person in this story.

What is also striking to me is that God did not need Rahab – the Lord did not need her to risk everything, the Lord did not need that cord hanging out of the window. The victory over Jericho did not depend on Rahab. When you read the full story of Joshua, it is quite clear that God's power is more than enough. But I think, in Rahab, God sees faithfulness, God feels the change in her heart and passes over her home and in doing so, grafts her into the covenant of blessing.

We don't hear anything else about Rahab in the stories of the Old Testament. We don't hear about Rahab again until the 1st chapter of the Gospel of Matthew – in the genealogy of Jesus. Rahab, the prostitute of Jericho, whose recognition of God's power and promises transformed her heart becomes a part of the lineage of God's son born into the world.

Rahab had everything she needed – was it the perfect life, probably not, but she had all the needed. Sure, she lived at the edges of society, but she had her own measure of power, she had her own rules, she had her own ways of protecting her family. But in the face of God's power in the world, she was moved to risk it all. She

could see the world changing around her but she didn't cling to the ways things were or they she felt they should be...instead she trusted in God even at the risk of losing her own life.

I have been thinking about that lately – probably as I have been pondering leadership training and the future of the church in the world today.

I LOVE that our Book of Order, one part of the constitution of the PCUSA, includes these words:

“The Church is to be the community of faith, entrusting itself to God alone, even at the risk of losing its own life.” (F-1,.0301)

We are called to be a community of faith, entrusting ourselves to God alone, even at the risk of losing our life.

Not many of us will have the lives of intrigue that transformed Rahab – at least I don't think so...but we are all called to risk our lives for our faith in some way. In small and big ways we are called to allow our faith to guide our hearts and minds, to shape how we live, the decisions we make, and how we treat others.

As we move through our lives, who or what are we protecting so God's plans for creation can come to fruition?

As we move through our lives, what relationships are we protecting, what paths are we walking so that God's purposes for the world might be worked out through our daily lives?

Friends, the stories of God's power, grace and faithfulness surround you, inviting you to be transformed like Rahab so that you too may risk all you have to further God's purposes in the world.

Let us support one another as we entrust ourselves to God alone as we live lives shaped by the risk of loving God fully and deeply and wholeheartedly.

Amen