

"Rahab's Story"
(a first-person narrative)
Sermon for Christmas Day
December 25, 2011
Text: Luke 2:1-20
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My name is Rahab, and I want to tell you my story. You may be asking yourself, "What could your story, Rahab, have to do with Christmas? We came to church today to be reminded once again of what happened a long time ago, the fantastic story about a baby who was born in Bethlehem, the baby who would grow up to be the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Son of God, and the Savior of the world." I know that you're here to listen to that story, and as it turns out, that story is a very important part of my story, as you will see before I finish.

My guess is that you are not very familiar with me. Don't kick yourself or anything. Most people don't have a clue as to who I am. My name appears in four places in the Bible—three of them in the New Testament, and one is in the Old Testament. In the eleventh chapter of the New Testament book of Hebrews, I am listed as an example of faith.

In that passage of scripture my name appears along with such persons as Noah, Abraham, Samson, David, and Samuel—biblical characters I'm sure you *have* heard of. In James 2:25 I am mentioned as being a person whom God justified by works, that is to say, I was made right with God because of something I did. In James' opinion I did something good enough to win God's approval.

So what did I do that was so great? Why am I considered to be a model of faith? What makes me so special? In order to find that out, you have to go to the first place in the Bible where I am mentioned, the Old Testament book of Joshua. There is where you will find most of my story.

I have to tell you that I was, as delicately as I can put it, engaged in what sometimes is referred to as "the world's oldest profession," living and working in the ancient city of Jericho. In the beginning of this story I was a harlot. I admit that upfront and am not proud of it. But in all fairness, you need to realize that in those days there were not many career opportunities for women. Talk about a low glass ceiling. I won't bore you with the details of how I came to be in that particular profession, but suffice it to say that I had little or no choice about it. In my case it was make a living that way or starve. I needed to work, no matter how degrading that work may have been, because I had my family to support. They depended on me to earn a living any way I could, and so I did.

Forgive me if I brag a little bit. I was very attractive. According to rabbinic tradition, I was one of the four most beautiful women in the world at that time. But even my great beauty could not offset the low self-esteem I had developed. It comes with the job I suppose. It was not easy being a woman of any kind in those days. We were all treated like second-class citizens, but it was even more difficult being a woman like me. I was made to feel used, abused, put-down, left-out, and worthless except as an object of desire. I was regarded like trash and forced to live on the fringe of society. I was marginalized and made to

feel that I had no real value as a person.

Because of my occupation, I was forced to live in a house next to the wall of the city. Jericho was heavily fortified, with high walls that made invasion of the city by enemy forces seemingly impossible. My house was built into one of those walls, so that in the event of an attack, my family and I would be among the first to die. Talk about being expendable. That makes a girl feel real good, doesn't it?

I hated that house. I despised having to live there. My clients certainly didn't reside in such a place. They lived in nice houses closer to the middle of the city, the respectable part of town. One thing was for sure. When men came to do business with me, there was no chance they would be seen by their parents, their wives, their fiancées, their friends, or their business associates. No one would be caught dead in my neighborhood.

But do you know what? As things worked out, having that house built into the wall turned out to be the best thing in the world for me and my family. It proved to be my salvation. It proved to be what allowed me to get out of the oppressive situation I was in. Here's what happened: One night two men sneaked into my house from outside the city. They were able to get in without any of the guards seeing them because my house had an outside window. Don't worry; these men were not burglars or escaped convicts or even guys just trying to have their way with me. These men turned out to be spies, Hebrew spies, sent by Joshua, the commander of the Israelite army.

The Hebrews, you see, had finished their forty year wilderness experience and were ready to take control of Canaan, the land promised

to them by God. Joshua had sent these two spies to assess the strength of the promised land and especially Jericho, the strongest city-state in the region. If the Israelites could take the fortified city of Jericho with its high walls, the people of God could take anything in Canaan their God wanted them to have.

I kept those spies overnight in my house. Naturally the news soon reached the king of Jericho. It's hard to keep these things a secret. The king sent messengers to my house, and they commanded me to produce the lodgers.

I had hidden the spies in stalks of flax on the roof of my house, but I lied to the king's men. I told them that I indeed had seen the men the king was looking for, but that the spies had escaped from the city a short time before. "They went that-a-way," I said. Now I know that lying is not a good thing to do, but I didn't feel that I owed the king or his henchmen any favors. They certainly hadn't done anything for me except made me feel like dirt. They barely made room for me and my family within the city walls.

Following my false lead, the agents of the king pursued the spies as far as the fords of the Jordan. While the king's men were on that wild goose chase, I had a chance to visit with the spies on the roof. We had a long, heart-to-heart talk. I told them that I had heard of their God and their God's mighty deeds. I told them that in my heart I believed that their God was the only true God. And I was convinced that if their God wanted to give them the city of Jericho, he could and would.

And so I agreed to help the spies escape safely, but I insisted on a favor in return. I asked the spies to swear that when Jericho was

destroyed by their God, the Hebrews would spare me and my family. The men agreed to my request, and I let them down the wall and to safety by a rope that I dropped from the window of my house. So that the Israelite army would know which house was mine when they attacked the city, I tied a scarlet thread in my window.

Those spies kept their promise to me. They were men of honor and dignity, and so was their leader. After the conquest of Jericho, when those mighty walls came tumbling down in a huge heap, Joshua told the spies to bring me and my family out safely. Then that great city that had been the site of such pain and suffering for me was burned to the ground. I was not sorry to see it in ashes [Ross, "Rahab," *IDB*, p. 6].

And I got to start all over again. That was good news indeed. The Israelites took me in as one of their own. They made me a part of their family, and they gave me a home with them. It didn't matter who I had been or what I had done before. They treated me like a hero and not a harlot. I no longer had to be engaged in my former profession. I didn't have to live on the fringe anymore. I wasn't put-down or left-out. I was liberated from abuse and oppression. I found a place where I belonged, and I found a people who welcomed me, accepted me, affirmed me, supported me, and encouraged me. For the first time in my life I began to feel good about myself. I began to see myself as a person of value and worth, honor and dignity. And it all came about because of my faith. I had put my trust in God, and as a result, I found new life with God's people.

That's my story. But I know what you are saying. "Rahab, that's a touching tale, but what does it have to do with Christmas, with the

birth of the Christ Child? How in the world does your story, as uplifting as it is, relate to what happened in Bethlehem?"

I'll tell you now what my story has to do with that baby's birth. You see, my name is mentioned in one other place in the New Testament. It is listed in the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. Do you know what is recorded there? It's the genealogy of Jesus, who that baby's ancestors were. And what does that genealogy tell you about me?

It tells you there that when I became a part of the nation of Israel, I married a man named Salmon. We had a son named Boaz. Boaz married Ruth, a beautiful foreign woman a lot like me. Ruth and Boaz had a son named Obed. And Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse was the father of King David. Jesus, as you know, is King David's heir. *That makes me baby Jesus' distant grandmother* [Beeching, "Rahab," *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, p. 1317].

Isn't that amazing? I was once a lowly prostitute, but I became a member of the family of the Savior of the world. So on the night that baby, my grandbaby Jesus, was born, you could find me singing with the rest of the heavenly host, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those he favors!" I could sing those words from the heart, because I had found firsthand God's favor and the peace that comes with it.

The celebration of this baby's birth on this day means a lot of things. But to me it means that my story can be true for all people. Just as I was brought into God's family, through faith in the child born in Bethlehem, you can be too. It doesn't matter who you are or what you have done. No matter how anyone else feels about you or how you

feel about yourself—through faith in this child God offers you a new start in life and a new family to which to belong. My story can be yours as well. This child, for whom there was no room in the inn, shows us that God's love and grace and mercy and blessing extend to everyone. No one is left out; no one is put-down; no one is on the fringe; no one is marginalized. You, like me, can be included in God's family if you will only do what I did: put your trust in the Lord and in his power to give you new life.