

Jesus' Family Tree 2: RAHAB

Joshua 2:14-21 [MW19-28]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai & Wellsford, Sunday 08 December 2019

Rahab, Rahab ...

- not exactly a name that rolls off the tongue is it?
sure it is very memorable
- yet, to me anyway, it does not conjure up a vision
of someone of stunning gorgeousness and rapturous beauty
- quite the opposite in fact!

Anyway – how many “Rahabs” do you know???

- I have never baptised anybody by that name
and it does not exactly seem the sort of name
parents would be keen to saddle a child with ...

Yet “Rahab” is the name of a very, very special person

- an important person in the story of the people of God
a vital link in Jesus' family tree
- all the more amazing when you consider she was a Canaanite
an outsider, enemy, one of them, most definitely not one of us
- and besides all that ... but I am getting ahead of things

Let me tell you the whole story about Rahab

- no need to gasp in panic or fear, it will not take long
it only takes up two and a bit chapters in the Book of Joshua
(that is the one in the Old Testament between Deuteronomy and Judges)
- chapter 2 and chapter 6 verses 17 and 22-25, that is it
here is the WMT version (Wayne's Modified Transcript)

The people of God, the Hebrews, were at the entrance to the Promised Land – which was presently occupied by all these Canaanites. They were waiting to make their next move. Joshua, their leader, sent a couple of blokes off to check things out – especially the strength of Jericho, the first target in their conquest of the land. So these two blokes, let us call them 'spies', entered the magnificent fortified city of Jericho and went to Rahab's house.

We are told that Rahab was a prostitute whose house was built into the city walls. The spies could go there with no questions asked and it was a good place to pick up information. Unfortunately for the spies news of their presence reached the King, who sent soldiers to Rahab's house demanding she hand over the spies.

This is where it all gets very interesting. You see Rahab is one with it lady. She has already hidden the spies on the roof of her house under piles of flax drying there. She tells the soldiers that she has seen the spies, but they have already left ... and they went that way, towards the Jordan river. So off the soldiers go on a wild goose chase!

Next Rahab talks with the spies, saying she and the people of Jericho have heard of the mighty deeds of the Lord God. She says she knows their God rules heaven and earth. She then makes a deal with the spies to spare her and her family when the people of God attack Jericho. They agree that her house will be a “safe house” marked by a red cord tied to the window. Rahab then helps the spies escape by lowering them down by a rope through a window in the city wall. The spies take to the hills for three days until the King's soldiers tire of looking for them and return to Jericho.

After the conquest of Jericho, Joshua told the spies to bring out Rahab and her family, before the city was burned. Rahab and her family were later allowed to live among God's people.

So that is it – the story of Rahab the Prostitute who helped God's people

- and I guess if “Rahab” did not exactly roll off the tongue
“Rahab the Prostitute” is going to sort of stick in the throat
- perhaps that helps us be aware that in every family, every family there are what we might euphemistically call 'black sheep' skeletons in the closet, things best kept hidden
- details from the past better left in shadow ...

One of my favourite stories about the 'black sheep' of the family goes like this:

The children in a prominent family decided to give their father a book of the family's history for a birthday present. They commissioned a professional biographer to do the work, carefully warning him of the family's “black sheep” problem: Uncle George had been executed in the electric chair for murder. The biographer assured the children he could handle the situation so that there would be no embarrassment. “I'll merely say that Uncle George occupied a chair of applied electronics at an important government institution. He was attached to his position by the strongest of ties and his death came as a real shock.”

Now, some might think having an ancestor like Rahab is something to hide

- Rahab the prostitute, you would not exactly want to make a feature of this and the other point worthy of note is that Rahab could be viewed as a 'traitor' after all, she sided with the spies against her own people
- a prostitute and a spy!
not exactly the makings of “ancestor of the generation”!

However, however, I have been doing some research

- and there are a few things we need to know about Rahab and her situation
let us deal with the prostitute thing first
- these days we are likely to view this through the eyes of morality:
prostitution is bad, a prostitute is a morally reprehensible individual
therefore Rahab must be a questionable character

In reality nothing could be further from the truth

- we need to see her situation as it really was
and view it not through the eyes of morality but *economics*
- that is right: economics!

The extreme poverty of Rahab's family forced her to help supply her family's dire need

- through the unwanted and demeaning necessity of prostitution
note that Rahab is not some fancy “Madame”, not even an innkeeper
she is doing what she can to help her family out of its extreme indebtedness

This also helps us understand why Rahab takes the side of the two enemy spies

- at first glance this makes her a traitor to her own people
but just who are her people?
- Rahab has more in common with the spies than with the King and his soldiers
for she herself is at the extreme margin of Canaanite society
- she takes the side of the “outsiders”, the Hebrew spies
against the King at the extreme pinnacle of society

The Rahab story can be seen as a folk narrative

- about poor people against abusive kingly power
in this Rahab belongs firmly on the side of the poor Hebrews ...

This story would have spoken to other families who had a similar experience

- of the harrowing life of being in extreme debt:
far from condemning Rahab for her prostitution and deception
they would sympathise with her and her family
- and they would cheer as she dared to make fools of the King and his men
seen in this light Rahab becomes a 'champion of the impoverished'

There is a further point of note

- the red cord Rahab tied to the window so her family would be spared
is reminiscent of the blood of the paschal lamb
which protected the Hebrew slaves at Passover

One writer comments on the story of Rahab like this:

Joshua assigned two men to spy out the walled city of Jericho. We know little of what they discovered about the city's military situation. Instead, the sacred writer focused on the prostitute, Rahab. We learn of her assistance to the spies and their promise of protection in the coming battle. Why so little attention to the major issues of strategy and policy? Why this emphasis on one woman? Perhaps it is to illustrate God's concern for each individual, no matter how seemingly insignificant or unworthy. Perhaps it is to honour Rahab's remarkable confession of faith in the God of Israel. And perhaps it is because Rahab became part of the lineage of King David and ultimately of Jesus Christ. Compared with matters such as those, military strategy seems insignificant.

Rahab was an ordinary person making the best of the situation she found herself in

- she was used by God for a noble purpose, and this is Good News
Good News for us ... assuring us we do not have to be what we are
or what we were
- there is hope

You see Rahab is mentioned in really quite glowing terms in the New Testament

- in Hebrews 11:31 it is noted that because of her faith she did not perish
in James 2:25 she is held up as an example of one who's faith
led her to do the right thing
- the other place is of course Matthew 1:5, the genealogy of Jesus
Jesus' family tree: "Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab"
- and in italics or a whispered aside
'you know that she was a prostitute don't you'

When it comes to sharing our life Jesus does, Jesus does

- including what went on before we came on the scene
because Jesus' family tree is pretty much like ours
- it includes "grandparent stories"
"parent stories" give you the 'edited' version of family history
"grandparent stories" give you the whole thing ... warts, skeletons and all

Jesus' family tree is a grandparent story

- Matthew 1:6 "David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah"
a parent story would have noted David slew Goliath, united the kingdom
wrote some psalms
- but no, the gospel reminds us of David's sin ... lusting after Bathsheba
making her pregnant, setting up her husband to be killed
- nothing is cut out or ignored, it is all in there

We can see for ourselves Jesus had a few 'hiccups' in his family tree

- however he overcame that, so there is hope for us too
if Jacob the rascal and Rahab the down on her luck prostitute
have a place in Jesus' family tree
- there is a place for us

Because we are all God's children

- I imagine God, in this case, like a grandparent
a grandparent who wants the best for their grandchildren
who knows some of them are trouble, off the track
but still loves them
- still cares about them so much
that he would come among them as one of them

Not a namby-pamby goody two shoes, but just like us

- connected with us, in the same ways we are
with a similar history and background
- just like you and me with
'the zeros, the heroes and everything in between'

Rahab the prostitute reminds us that we can overcome any background

- any circumstances, any mistakes, bad choices, denied options
and enjoy new life in God's family

[Pause]

Let us pray:

Faithful God

in the midst of all that is broken

and all those who are held captive

renew within us this Advent Season

a sense of your promise of peace and freedom for all your children.

Amen.