

Advent Adventures 2022, Dec 4: Rahab – Joshua 2
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Risk and respectability

Pre-service music:

Heaven Shall Not Wait – StF 701

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHMt3YJHbZE&list=PLfJKMN-CtuWCeWWWKYxMLY_81soj1dufJ&index=30

Longing for light (Christ be our light)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ITDS5B218g&list=PLfJKMN-CtuWCeWWWKYxMLY_81soj1dufJ&index=33

Into the darkness – StF 173

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXKOxub5obc&t=45s>

Praise to the God who clears the way – StF 183

== ORDER OF SERVICE ==

Call to worship and intro

Let us build a house – StF 409

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FhPnjA7wsIY&t=6s>

Intro to monologue

Monologue

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel – StF 180

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRDjVh2uCMw>

Reflection

Intercessions

I will speak out – StF 702

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZCVPKzEQ1EQ&t=29s>

Benediction

Welcome to our second Advent service of this year

As we continue to explore the stories of the four women listed
In Matthew's genealogy of Jesus.

Last week we heard from Tamar, who found herself in a very difficult position

And 'tricked' her way into gaining the respect that had been denied her.

She, like the other women in Matthew's genealogy, was a foreigner --

A Canaanite woman who was attracted to the Hebrew God
she knew as El-Shaddai

And she thus brought cultural diversity into Jesus' lineage

As well as perhaps a respect for those who are different.

This week we'll be hearing Rahab's story, based on what is found in Joshua 2.

Rahab was also a foreigner and an outcaste from society

Who was attracted to the Hebrew God

Whom she understood as a champion for the down-trodden.

A special part of her story that we will explore

Focusses on hospitality –

For that reason, we'll begin our worship with a favourite hymn

Which isn't usually considered an Advent hymn,

But it certainly speaks of hospitality – so I think Rahab would approve...

'Let Us Build a House'/All Are Welcome –

Methodist connexional Advent emphasis: "There is Room"

Rahab managed to find room...

Rahab Monologue

Well, who have we here?
Welcome! You've come a long way
To come this far out of the settlement.
I guess you must be like me:
Living on the edge.

Have a seat.
Here, have some figs
And some water from the well
And we can talk.
Surely you've heard I like to talk.
When one lives on the edge
Talking is a way of staying connected.
So I talk -- and if people don't want to listen
They can go back into town!

Actually life out here
At the edge of the settlement
Is not bad at all --
The Hebrew people treat me well --
Much better than my days
On the edge of Jericho.

Here I'm a bit of a hero, I guess.
There I was merely a harlot.
Funny how those titles come
And stick to one like burrs in sheep's wool.
It was my hospitality that got me both titles:
A harlot in Jericho because I welcomed strangers
A hero to the Hebrew because I welcomed their spies
When they were strangers.

Somehow people think there was a choice involved:
That I chose to be a harlot -- who would make such a choice?!
That I chose to be a hero?
No! In both cases I chose only to welcome the other
And to survive.

There are few choices, you know,
For the youngest daughter of a large and poor family.
Even in mighty Jericho, the Great Walled City,
There would be very few men left
After the war took them away each spring.
And those few who were left
Were prized for the daughters of the rich men --
The oldest daughters first,
And the prettiest ones,
And after a while I realized
That my options for marriage were very few.

I knew my family's flax trade well:
I could spin and weave and make ropes with the best of them,
And so I was a spinster.
And when my brothers' wives and babies
Filled my father's house to overflowing,
I started building a little house of my own –
Just a room, really,
In a place no one else would claim.
I chose a spot on the wide city wall of Jericho.
I chose then to live on the edge.

You know, once you've made the decision,
Living on the edge is really an awesome adventure.
From the edge, one has a wonderful view
Of the respectable people
Living respectable lives
Inside respectable houses
With respectable husbands
And respectable children
And respectable goats
And respectable routines
And respectable boredom.

But if you look over in the other direction,
You have a wonderful view of the rest of the world:
Howling desert and scorching suns
And camels and mountains
And palm trees and oases
And travelers coming from all corners of the earth.
Traders trading,
Soldiers marching,
New friends who are only strangers
Because you haven't met them yet!

And so you invite them in
And become acquainted
And sing new songs
And hear new stories
And laugh at new jokes.
And the respectable people
Look up from their respectable boredom
And wonder what there is to laugh about
And decide it must not be anything respectable,
And so they label she-who-laugh-with-strange-men
As a harlot.

Which, in a way, is a great relief,
Because then respectable people don't bother you anymore,
And the adventurous ones find their way to you

Without bothering anybody else!

And so I spent my days living on the edge,
Spinning my flax and linen and my stories,
And laughing at jokes
And hearing other stories of a world beyond.

So it was that afternoon when those two young men came.
Handsome men they were!
And I guessed before I heard them speak
That finally the Hebrews
had finally found their way out of the desert.

We'd heard stories of them for years.
Even before I moved to the wall,
I'd heard of how their god had defeated Pharaoh –
Just imagine!
And then more recently stories of King Sihon's trouncing
And mighty Og's defeat filled the air with excitement.

Excitement and fear –
Fear of attack
Fear of war
Especially for those whose respectability
Depended on their safety.
It was fear that built
The famous Walls of Jericho,
Thick wide double walls, one inside the other,
Wide walls that made would-be conquerors
Very reluctant to attack.

Of course, a house atop a wall
Is not very safe in a war,
At least not in the respectable context.
But my safety had always lay
In my hospitality,
In my ability to listen
And learn from the stories of strangers

Knowing my guests that day
Were scouts for people with a very powerful god,
I listened very carefully indeed,
As I offered my dates and olives and goat's milk.
I listened carefully
To hear if the stories rang true.

But as I listened, I heard something different
In the way they talked about their god.
It was a radically different god
Than the ones I'd heard about before.

They talked about a god
Who pitied an enslaved people --
The Hebrews themselves!
And brought them while they were slaves
Out of a foreign land --
Mighty Egypt!

A god who was powerful
Yet willing to act on behalf of slaves,
On behalf of the lowest rung of society.
A god who was powerful
Even in a land where a Pharaoh reigned --
That must be a very different god indeed!
A god different than the local territorial deities
Which the respectable priests blessed
So that they could keep their respectable priestdoms --
Different than the local gods
Who demanded sacrifices to keep the local city safe.

Perhaps this god who had power
For unrespectable people
Outside a local area,
This god might be a suitable god
For those who lived on the edge
Even on the edge of mighty Jericho.

So, yes I listened very hard
To my guests that day.
And I decided such a god must truly be
The God of Heaven and all the earth!
This was MY kind of God!

From that moment on,
I never looked back over the respectable side of the wall.
Though, I knew, of course,
That the respectable side was looking up at me
Perched on the edge,
And that it would be no time at all
Before the respectable grapevine
Had sped news of my guests to the king.
(Gossip travels fastest in the most respectable places!)

By then I had hospitably shown my guests
The abundant stacks of flax drying on my sunny rooftop --
And they were comfortably hidden away
By the time the king's messengers arrived
Demanding I turn my guests over to the king!
Ah! Respectability demanding respect
From despised Adventure!

I still had a length of flaxen rope in my hand
From the roof,
And I gripped it hard
To keep my face sober
As I told the messengers that the Hebrew men
Had left my room earlier...
And that they should hurry to overtake them.

As soon as the door was shut
And the sounds of their voices far down the road,
The laughter sputtered out from my lips
Scaring all the cats into the shadows.
When I could contain myself,
I hurried upstairs
And made my deal with the young men.
We peered over the edge into the darkness,
The flaming torches of the running soldiers
Making eerie streaks into the distance.
We negotiated in whispers
And how I would let them down
With one of my ropes,
The red one.
And to which hills they would escape
And how long they should stay away.
And then we spoke of the oncoming attack from the Hebrews
And we agreed that my red rope
Would hang from the window
On the edge
Like the red blood on the Hebrew door frames
During their Passover flight.

As my red rope would save their lives,
So it could save mine
And it could save the lives of my family
Assuming that, for once,
My family would attempt a life-giving Adventure
Instead of a fatal respectability.

And so the men slipped away that night
From the edge
On my rope
Into a blanket of night.

And several days later,
My rope saved the lives of my family
And myself as well.
I was the last one down
From my house on the edge
Before the wall fell
In a deafening, deadly crash,

Followed by screaming and wailing
As the respectable ones
All went up in flames.

O silly people!
Don't you know
That walls won't keep you safe?

I took away with me
A length of my rope
To help me remember
Those days on the edge
And the God who welcomes harlots
Into the clan
And makes them into heroes.

You know, it's hard for a hero
To live on the edge.
Everybody wants to think of a hero
As respectable.
I think God understand that:
Win a few wars.
Rescue a few slaves,
And they even want to turn God into a King.
Somehow I don't think God wants to be a king.
How would a king live on the edge?

But I'm an old woman now.
Somehow I'm respectable enough to have a husband!
A Hebrew man
Who still has enough desert sand in his shoes
To resist too much respectable safety.

I have a son, too,
Boaz – a fine, handsome young man.
He grows barley instead of flax,
But I tell him to watch out for – and protect—
The young women who work his field,
Especially the ones who live on the edge...
“In the name of the God who lives on the edge,
Look out for them, Boaz!”

Someday he'll probably marry, too.
Respectability has a great pull to it!
I'm sure you've found that out for yourself –
And you're probably ready for this old woman
To stop talking so you can go home—
Go home to safety and respectability.

As for me, I'll keep holding onto my red rope

And watching the adventure from the edge.
You're most welcome to join me, if you'd like.
There's always room for one more
In the adventure.

My and my rope and
My totally unrespectable God,
We like it here on the edge.
Perhaps you'll join us.

Reflection

Matthew's genealogy is uncovering lots of 'skeletons in the closet'!

Indeed, sometimes difficult circumstances demand difficult choices –

Were you surprised to find a prostitute in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus?

A genealogy that also includes King David as that prostitute's great-great-grandson?

What did you think of her explanation of how she found herself in that position—

On the edge of Jericho, so society – how she turned that into an advantage

Last Sunday we wondered how Tamar's legacy

As a person who used a bit of 'trickery' to right a social wrong

Like Robin Hood or Jacob or Rachel or Leah or Rebekah –

How might that have influenced Jesus' understanding of what was good and right and true

I wonder if that was part of why he was so often keen

To reinterpret the Law as the Pharisees and Sadducees knew it –

As we consider Rahab's legacy today, I wonder if her presence in Jesus' genealogy

Might have influenced how he regarded prostitutes –

There are many references in the Gospels about Jesus' interacting with them –

He's often taken to task for considering their plight

Rather than rejecting them out of hand.

Some feminist scholars have commented that Jesus' acceptance of such

May have led many 'respectable' people

to cast dispersions on the Christian community...

And yet Matthew's gospel includes Rahab, whose story would be well known...

Is this another case of a story that can't be ignored?

Or is Matthew trying to include a woman who perhaps could be considered

To be reformed – transformed – by her strategic help at a desperate time?

In the sketch we've heard, Rahab is quite happy with living 'on the edge' –

Some have said that Christianity is *best* when it is expressed

with and for those on the margins...

Some have said that the only true Christian encounters happen on the margins...

John Wesley is attributing with lamenting that the more respectable Methodists became

The less effective they would be in their discipleship

And yet, the Christian Church has – since the time of Constantine –

Sought to be the Centre.... Which has usually meant quite a bit of 'respectability'

What would Rahab think of us?!?!

At the same time, Rahab gradually found herself being more 'respectable'—

perhaps she was able to retain some of her perspective of having lived 'on the edge'...

Connexional 'There is room' campaign –

Couples who want to get married in a church (respectable?)

But not eager to attend worship – would they be welcome?

Intercessions

Lord God of Rahab and Tamar and so many other women and me
that we might avoid in our everyday life –

We want to be a welcoming people,
But sometimes we're not sure how to do that –
Or sure if they really want to be welcomed....

Because we're not sure who they are
Or the risks they've decided to take
Or whether those risks will rub off on us...

We listen again to what you have to say to us today about who they are
And who we are
And how we are all your children...

We listen again, Lord, to hear what you have to say about being 'respectable' –
About wanting to have others think well of us: to give us respect.
About the respect we give – or withhold – from others.

Sometimes we confuse being respected with being revered...
We forget that you already love each of us and have declared us worthy –
Even as we spend time and energy and money trying to get everyone else's respect –

Sometimes we confuse being respected with making an appearance
That everything is perfect in our lives –
That we have enough money, enough status, enough security...

Lord, you know it gets wearisome to always keep trying to be perfect
To know all the answers, and get everything right...

The mask is often quite heavy to bear.
Sometimes we would rather just be *real*....

But perhaps we've misunderstood 'respectability', Lord.
It's not only about being 'good' and presenting an acceptable outside –
It's about all the things that are going on inside us –
About our ability to trust you to use us in the way you see fit.
About our ability to recognise the worth of ourselves
And that of each other.

Perhaps you try to show us that we gain the most respect
When we respect others.

Lord, you told us when we 'did it to the least of these, you did it to me' –
But we confess that we've often turned that statement
Into a gratuitous way of showing how good we are
By helping those who are 'beneath' us...

But that's not the way you treated people, Lord.
You sat and ate and walked and talked
With people who others rejected.
Not as objects of pity,
But as persons of worth.

Help us, good Lord, to take the risks of loving all your children
Even the ones who really annoy us.

Help us to see the world from the edge as you did.

Come, Lord Jesus, come – and show us how to really live and really love again. Amen.

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Benediction:

God of Risk, who lives at the margins and welcomes everyone in –

Save us from too much respectability;

Bless us and keep us aware and welcoming of all your children. Amen.