



One Page Sermon

By Pastor Robb McCoy

December 10, 2023

The Grandmothers: Rahab

Recap of sermon from December 10, 2023

Scripture: Joshua 2:1-21

“Rahab the prostitute” is named twice in the New Testament as a model of faith in action. Both James 2:25 and Hebrews 11:31 praise her and cite her as an example of someone who should be honored. She is named in Matthew 1:5 as one of the mothers in Jesus’ genealogy.

Rahab’s inn seemed to serve as a part of the wall that surrounded Jericho (this was a common way to build ancient cities, with the “wall” being a combination of large buildings and walls forming the perimeter of the city). She received Israelite spies who were sent by Joshua to learn about the city’s defenses. This was the first stage of the Israelite’s occupation of the “Promised Land”

Rahab’s actions are incredible in this brief story. It can be argued that she manipulates three parties, all of whom are much more powerful than her. First, she manipulates the Jericho guard. When they confront her, she sends them on a wild goose chase to find the Israeli spies. Second, she manipulates the spies themselves, keeping them relatively safe but still in a precarious spot when she negotiates for the lives of her and her family. Last, she manipulates God’s plan.

The Exodus tradition is clear about how the Israelites should occupy the land. “I will hand over to you the inhabitants of the land, and you shall drive them out before you. You shall make no covenant with them and their gods.” (Exodus 23:32). Yet Rahab’s story continues in Joshua 6:25 “Joshua let Rahab live, her family, and everyone related to her. So her family still lives among Israel today.”

In other words, Joshua made an agreement with a Canaanite, in direct opposition to God’s decree in Exodus, and this agreement helped lead the Israelites to victory. From the very first battle in the occupation, there were Canaanites who were spared. The agreement between Rahab’s family and the Israelites allowed them both to prosper.

This reveals a deeper tension that is found throughout the Hebrew Bible. There are elements of Scripture that suggest that the Israelites must be pure. They must take total control of the Land and completely destroy all of their enemies. There are truly disturbing calls for genocide found in the stories of occupation. These flow from the promises made to Abraham that are eternal. The covenant of the Land is described as unwavering and pure. The Land belongs to Israel. Period.

But Deuteronomy provides the giant “If.” The ‘if’ is found many places, but is pronounced in the final speech of Deuteronomy. “Now

if you really obey the Lord your God’s voice, by carefully keeping his commandments... then the Lord your God will set you high above all nations” (Deut. 28:1). “But if you don’t obey the Lord your God’s voice by carefully doing all his commandments and his regulations... all these curses will come upon you” (Deut. 28:15).

The promises made to Abraham were made for a purpose. Five times in Genesis it is repeated that Abraham is blessed for a reason: to be a blessing to all (Gen 12:3, 18:18, 22:18, 26:4, 28:14). Deuteronomy backs up this claim, if Abraham ceases to be a blessing to all, then the promises made will turn to curses.

This is an element of the Biblical story that many ignore. As people of God, our unwavering support should be on the side of justice and peace. Drawing direct lines from the Biblical story to modern national politics and wars is always a fraught endeavor. Within the Bible is a strong tension between *isolation from* and *care for* “the other.”

There should be a tension in all of our convictions about what is happening right now in Gaza. Multiple things can be true. Israeli people should feel safe. We grieve the 1,200 deaths and reprehensible violence that occurred on October 7. Palestinian people and children should not be collateral damage, even in the pursuit of terrorists and militants. We grieve the 18,000 Palestinian deaths and the rising humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Hostages should be released. Aid should be given. A path to a just cease-fire must be found.

Antisemitic violence against Jewish people is evil and the rise of it is disturbing. Holocaust-denial is on the rise and needs to end. Islamophobic violence against Muslims is evil and the rise of it is disturbing. The rhetoric and actions of Hamas is deplorable and cannot be justified. The apartheid policies of Israel in Gaza should be challenged and criticized. The death of innocent Israeli and Palestinian people should end. The self-determination of Israeli and Palestinian people should be protected. These should not be seen as political, partisan, or even controversial statements.

I do not have the expertise to untangle the problems in Israel/Palestine, but our Biblical story doesn’t support sweeping generalizations or unwavering support for anything but peace and justice. Rahab the Canaanite saved the Israelites in a city in what is now known as the West Bank and her family lived with them in peace. There is an Advent hope that a Jewish boy born in a West Bank town called Bethlehem could be the Prince of Peace.

Next Week is the third Sunday of Advent
Wear festive Christmas attire.
The Third Grandmother, Ruth 2:1-21

TWO RIVERS CHURCH WEEKLY UPDATE

To subscribe to weekly e-newsletter, go to TwoRiversUMC.org/subscribe

Christmas Gift Packages

We need drivers and bakers to help with the Christmas gift packages that get delivered to various members of Two Rivers Church. Homemade baked goods make a special addition to the gift bags and should be brought to church on Sunday, December 17. Delivery drivers are needed to bring the gifts to our members who cannot come to worship any longer.

These are an important way to help stay connected to our members who are not as mobile as they once were.



You're invited to a baby shower!

The Confirmation Class would like to invite you to a Baby Shower for Mary on December 31 in Epworth Hall. On the Sunday before Epiphany, we will follow the lead of the magi and bring gifts for the baby Jesus. Our gifts will be donated to Family Resources, an important social service organization that works in the Quad Cities.

The celebration will include games, inter-generational activities, and refreshments. It will take place at 10:45 a.m. downstairs in Epworth Hall.

Argrow's House Pop-Up Store

Argrow's House will set up a special Christmas pop-up store in the sanctuary on December 17. Some may remember that they did something similar on the Sunday before Mother's Day in the spring.

Argrow's House is a nurturing community and social enterprise supporting female survivors of domestic abuse or sexual violence. We support women and children along their entire healing journey in order to achieve social and economic vitality. Your purchase helps provide financial empowerment and free holistic services.

SCRIPTURE VERSE FOR THE WEEK OF DEC. 17: Luke 1:46-47

"With all my heart I glorify the Lord! In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior."

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Dec. 17	Sunday	Ruth 3:1-18, 4:13-17	Ruth's story
Dec. 18	Monday	Ruth 4:1-12	The part we skipped on Sunday
Dec. 19	Tuesday	Ezra 9:10-15	Ezra didn't read Ruth
Dec. 20	Wednesday	Luke 1:46-56	Mary's song, "The Magnificat"
Dec. 21	Thursday	2 Samuel 11:1-15	David and Bathsheba
Dec. 22	Friday	2 Samuel 11:16-27	David covers up his sin
Dec. 23	Saturday	2 Samuel 12:1-15	Nathan's judgment of David

UPCOMING SERMON: Grandmothers of Jesus

Dec. 24	4th Advent at 9:30 a.m.	Bathsheba 2 Samuel 11:1-15
	Christmas Eve at 4:00 p.m.	
Dec. 31	Epiphany Sunday	Matthew 2:1-15
Jan. 7	Confirmation Sunday	Isaiah 43:1-7 and Galatians 6:2