

WELCOME 26th May 2024 – 1st Sunday after Pentecost '24 B

Joshua 2:1-24

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! **Bible Study Qs/GPs** are there to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & so you can share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups** on Friday @ 1p.m.

As we move into this week... **Courage** is not the absence of fear. It's acting in spite of it. It's moving against the resistance caused by fear into the unknown. Mark Twain? Scott Peck? Any of a dozen 'life coaches' or school counsellors? Not sure who said it first...but they're right. At some point every one of us is afraid...every one of us feels the icy grip of fear...of being wrong being embarrassed...losing face...others will think less of us...loss, change or failure *BUT* in that fear we have the opportunity to act.

Living courageously requires just that sort of living...of acting in spite of fear...of doing what is right even if the cost is great. For the next 6 weeks, we'll discover in the Bible's pages people who do **EXACTLY** that...They live courageously. Go against the flow trusting the God who holds all things in his hands also promises a life more abundant with far more influence & impact than silence & hiding can offer.

Today...Rahab, a woman known more for her profession than her profession of faith, but whose profession of faith brings her & her family safely into the embrace of God & into the lineage of Jesus. She says...

I know the Lord has given you this land...

No wonder our hearts have melted in fear!

No one has the courage to fight after hearing such things.

For the Lord your God is the supreme God of the heavens above & the earth below.

There is always a place in God's kingdom for those with the courage to act on the knowledge that He is Lord & walk with Him into the unknown.

We'll experience & share that today...Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Most wonderful God, forever beyond our grasp yet by your Spirit always within us

Most wonderful Christ, forever ahead of us in wisdom and love yet through your Spirit always beside us,

Most wonderful Spirit, forever larger than the whole universe yet living in our hearts,

Work in our hearts & lives today to kindle boldness & assurance in faith. Let your Word be the power that motivates all we are & all we do. Move us in your mission to the world to the people we know with the promise that in you all things are made new. To your praise and glory: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God to be ever loved, adored and served! Amen!

Let's hear God's Word

FAITH CHAT:

1. Who is someone you admire for their courage & conviction?
2. Where in your life would courage & conviction be most helpful right now?

1 PENTECOST '24 B – LIVING COURAGEOUSLY: RAHAB

Call to mind that moment when you were most afraid...when for that instant or maybe longer...it felt like the floor fell out from under your feet. Don't need to share just... REMEMBER...you got the 2a.m. phone call...the diagnosis you'd prayed against...a sick feeling you knew you couldn't ignore...car went somewhere you hadn't planned & you were still in it...your child made a decision & you knew there might be no way back from it... REMEMBER... that moment when you were most afraid...GOT IT? I remember being 12-13 & in my neighbor's back yard & their 35-40kg black & tan hound standing on my chest...my left arm in its mouth trying to keep it from biting my face again while it fought might & main to finish what it had started. I REMEMBER...

Whatever that feels like for you/me...the people of Jericho had it worse. Just outside their city walls was a nation of "invaders." A people 750K-1M strong. An army of dozens of 1000s poised to attack w/ a track record of success...overwhelming victories.

"We are all afraid of you. Everyone in the land is living in terror. For we have heard how the Lord made a dry path for you through the Red Sea when you left Egypt. We know what you did to Sihon & Og, the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan River, whose people you completely destroyed."

Rahab gets the story straight in all its gory detail. From Egypt to just beyond the Jordan, God has laid waste to kings & nations for the people of his promise. HE'S NOT DONE. The land under her feet is destined to flow w/ milk & honey...to flourish in the grace & power of Yahweh who has brought his people here BUT NONE who live there now will enjoy the bounty. You can feel the fear. It's palpable...tangible...you can taste it in the water & smell it in the air. *We are all afraid...Everyone...living in terror*

Fear is the story they hide from their children but talk about when the lamps are dim. Terror is what the soldiers say as they make arrows & sharpen swords that will likely have no effect. Rahab speaks for a people who sense nothing they do will matter. Their lives, livelihoods, homes, families, all they've worked for over generations... their culture & sense of themselves as a people will become heaps of ashes blown by the wind. Their city scattered charred rubble. A ruin of what was an architectural marvel. Flames will devour what the sword doesn't destroy.

At some point every one of us is afraid. Every one of us feels the icy grip of fear... But in fear we have opportunity to act: *"I know the Lord has given you this land...No wonder our hearts have melted in fear! No one has the courage to fight after hearing such things. For the Lord your God is the supreme God of the heavens above & the earth below. Now swear to me by the Lord that you will be kind to me & my family since I have helped you. Give me some guarantee that when Jericho is conquered, you will let me live, along with my father & mother, my brothers & sisters, & all their families."*

After taking the Israelite spies into her home, hiding them, lying about their departure & sending the king's soldiers on a wild goose chase...she professes significant faith & acknowledges God's sovereignty over all things AND His saving power that she hopes has room for her & those she loves. It's one thing to know your world is collapsing. It's another to reach for the one hope that seems secure. It's one thing to see your life isn't going to produce what you'd thought it would, that all your efforts & striving & playing the hand you were dealt is futile...that your dreams exceed your reach. It's yet something else to acknowledge that weakness & turn to the only source of strength.

I know the Lord has given you this land... What an interesting thing to say. She can look out her window & see the nation of Israel camped outside the city walls. She's heard the stories from Egypt including the desolation of Egypt's army at the Red Sea. The two warrior kings who attacked the Israelites are now footnotes in history & food for vultures & scavengers of the desert. But in the threat to everything she holds dear, she sees Yahweh's hand. *I know the Lord has given you this land...*

How many of us look at the world or our nation, our city, or even our own homes (especially when things are going poorly) & say, "I think God's doing something here." Rahab does. How many of us look at a faltering nation, a declining culture, a city in turmoil or a house beset by perpetual chaos & offer up, "Maybe God's tearing this down so he can rebuild his way." Rahab does. *"We are ALL afraid of you. EVERYONE in the land is living in terror. For WE have heard...And WE know..."* She's not alone in knowing what's about to happen, but she seems the ONLY ONE willing to turn toward the God of redemption & freedom to ask if there's a place for her at his table. *"Now swear to me by the Lord that you will be kind to me & my family since I have helped you... let me live, along with my father & mother, my brothers & sisters, & all their families."*

What has always baffled me though is the two spies. What are they doing at Rahab's house? I don't think they went there for her business interests, or their pleasure. It seems Rahab is not a common street prostitute or even one of the local brothel dwellers. The King of Jericho is acquainted w/ her which suggests she is one of the pagan religious prostitutes whose profession was to service worshippers in the fertility rituals of the Ancient Near East. She acts in place of the gods to act out the sowing/planting fertility cycle & in so doing remind the gods that what her clients need are new lambs, healthy calves, abundant crops, & lots of children. That's how fertility religions worked. You "worship" by visiting the temple prostitutes & the gods were supposed to see that & accept your offering & bless you.

The spies seem to know that in all of that she keeps company w/ the insiders/in-the-know people in town...the elite & well-connected...she'll know the ins/outs of Jericho better than any simply by the company she keeps. She does, but what a surprise **THEY** receive. **They** think they're on a reconnaissance mission. God turns it into a rescue mission. "Now swear to me by the Lord that you will be kind to me & my family since I have helped you... let me live..." along with those I love...

Two things... TAKE IT HOME Every week when we wrap up I ask you to picture a place in your coming week's journey in life where you can take what we experience/learn here & put it into practice. And w/o fail one of you will say to me, "John I don't know where I'm going to be this week. I can't predict my schedule. I don't have a regular routine so I just don't know." My answer is always the same. I don't care. That's not an excuse. Every one of us will interact/engage w/ another human being this week. I assure you everybody in this room will go to the Dr, shops, petrol station, coffee w/ friends, meal w/ family, work, school, chat w/ a neighbour... Every one of us will interact/engage w/ another human being this week. There are no hermits in this room

It is w/in the realm of God's power that just when you think all you're doing is going to buy bread/milk that the Holy Spirit will turn your quick trip into a rescue mission for someone else. Please do not have so little faith in the Holy Spirit to believe your conversation w/ a neighbour about their geraniums can't turn into an eternal moment for them or that a quiet word to your grandson/daughter/niece/nephew might shift the axis of the next generation. I was talking to a church planter in Western Sydney. He'd told me earlier in the week that he's got revival breaking out all around him & I thought I'd take some long-service leave & go spend a couple weeks follow him around. He said, "John...why would you want to do that? You already do everything I do. Didn't you just bring Tx souvenirs to all the checkout folks at Woolies?" No just 2...and a click-n-collect girl. And my Dr...next door neighbour. "Don't you already know the names of the kids of the couple that manage your favourite coffee shop?" Please do not have so little faith in the Holy Spirit to believe that your conversation w/ a neighbour friend Dr can't turn into an eternal moment for them or that a quiet word might shift the axis of the next generation.

See...here's the thing... "**Now** swear to me by the Lord that you will be kind to me & my family since I have helped you... let me live, along with my father & mother, my brothers & sisters, & all their families." Rahab has spent her entire adult life...probably longer...surrendering her body to the work of a pagan god. Yet she discovers there is nothing in her past, nothing in her prior beliefs & nothing in her previous moral outlook standing in the way of God's saving grace. Of all the people in Jericho she may have seen herself as the most unsaveable...but she trusts perhaps there is a

place for her at God's table. And there is...& not just at the table...Matthew tells us the rest: *This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of David & of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac. Isaac was the father of Jacob. Jacob was the father of Judah & his brothers...Nahshon was the father of Salmon. Salmon was the father of Boaz (whose mother was Rahab). Boaz was the father of Obed (whose mother was Ruth). Obed was the father of Jesse. Jesse was the father of King David.* – Mt 1:1-6

Rahab is a woman known more for her profession than her profession of faith, but her profession of faith brings her & her family safely into the embrace of God & into the lineage of Jesus. A recon mission becomes a rescue mission & a pagan prostitute becomes part of the family tree of faith...whose "faith blood" we share as unworthy recipients of grace mercy & salvation that we could not have earned & whose pasts did not exclude. There is always a place in God's kingdom for those w/ the courage to act on the knowledge that He is Lord & walk w/ Him into the unknown

Last thing...today is Trinity Sunday. The 1st Sunday following Pentecost (outpouring of the Holy Spirit) when the church acknowledges the mystery of One God in Three Persons – Father, Son & Spirit. And we grapple for images & depictions to communicate that... But in the 1400s Russian painter Andrei Rublev crafted **this** icon of the Trinity. Probably the most famous of all orthodox artwork on the Triune God. What strikes me is the reminder that God is a relationship of intimate love even within himself... **BUT MORE**...notice there's a space at the table...an opening w/ food set before it... Rublev painted the Trinity as an invitation to join the fellowship of love in God's presence at the table w/ Him. There is always a place in God's kingdom for those w/ the courage to act on the knowledge that He is Lord & walk w/ Him into the unknown...

TAKE IT HOME-

Where will you commit to living courageously this week so that the Spirit's power & Christ's love might be seen in you?

Who will you invite to that table?

Let's pray with that in mind...

Lord Jesus, you transformed your disciples through the power of the Holy Spirit, filling them with courage, boldness & conviction. Fill us with that same power, the power to proclaim your name daily in our lives, for you alone have the power to rescue heal & bring salvation to this world. We ask this in your powerful name. Amen.