

Text: Joshua 2

Date: August 5, 2018

Focus: Our unlikely Savior who saves unlikely people in the most unlikely of ways can be trusted.

Function: As Christians, we have faith in our unlikely God who saves us unlikely people in unlikely ways.

In Jesus Name, Amen.

Maybe you've found this to be true: God has a way of using the least likely of people to teach us the lessons we need to learn.

I found that to be true in seminary. Now, don't get me wrong, I had a lot of wonderful teachers and professors and pastors who opened up the Scriptures to me and showed me the ways of God. And I am thankful for all of them, and I'm sure that God was working through them. But, I also found it to be true that when I least expected it, in the least likely of ways and places, and often the most unlikely of people, God was teaching me lessons I could never learn in the comfort of a classroom or lecture hall.

It was in a converted bowling alley turned sanctuary at an inner-city church on the north side of St. Louis through a group of people I was sent to serve that God taught me that the success of a church cannot be determined from numbers or from amenities or from budget worksheets, but from factors that so often cannot be calculated like faithfulness to the Scriptures and joy in the Lord. It was in that same sanctuary that I learned that "proper" worship can include hands raised in the air, shouts to the Lord, and dancing in the aisle.

It was from a fellow student – not a class or a Doctor of Theology – that I learned how to spend time with the Lord. I remember one late evening as a few of my friends and I sat around a bonfire talking that one of my best friends began to lecture us on the importance of spending time in the Word and challenged us future pastors to read through the whole Bible before we graduated AT LEAST once.

It was on a mission trip to one of the poorest places on earth – a garbage dump turned shanty village on the outskirts of Guatemala City – that God taught me what it means to be content and thankful and joy-filled. I had read about those things. I had heard teachers lecture about it and read all the Bible passages. But, it wasn't until one of the poorest families I had or will ever meet sang about the treasure of Jesus, that I learned what it means to be truly grateful with whatever God has given.

God has a way of using the most unlikely of people to teach us the lessons we need to learn.

Maybe for you it's been a child. Maybe your own child, who taught you about forgiveness or repentance. And it was only until you heard your own little boy or girl say, "I forgive you mommy" that you learned what it meant to truly and freely forgive. Or, maybe it was through a hungry, homeless woman that you thought you were sent to serve that you learned

why it is we give thanks before every meal. Or maybe it was through a handicapped, mentally challenged man, who couldn't recite any Bible verses or form a coherent prayer that you learned what it meant to KNOW Jesus. Or maybe, maybe, just maybe, it was from someone who sits on the other side of the political aisle from you – Democrat or Republican – that God taught you what kindness or humility or respect looks like.

God has a way of using the most unlikely of people to teach us the lessons we need to learn.

I would guess that for the two men in our reading for today from Joshua, they never could have expected to get a lesson in faith from Rahab.

Because here they were, two representatives of the Most High God, sent into enemy territory to scout out how exactly they would bring the walls of Jericho tumbling down. These two guys were hand-picked by Joshua himself. They were Jews. Members of the chosen race. Sons in God's family.

And somehow, on the very night they are sent to do the most important job of their lives, they end up in the bedroom of the enemy. Like two backwoods country boys transplanted to the Las Vegas strip, they end up in the home of a foreign, pagan, prostitute. And I highly doubt they were there to lead a Bible study.

And before they know it, these two men who had Moses as a preacher, who had learned the 10 commandments and who praised God on the Sabbath, these two men are getting a lesson on their God from that foreign, pagan, prostitute.

And the first lesson that this unlikely heroine teaches us is about God and His undeserved grace. Because out of everyone that God could have saved that day, from an earthly perspective, Rahab didn't have any worthiness she could claim. As a citizen of Jericho – she wasn't from the right place. Her veins did not pulse with the right blood. She couldn't boast about her title, or riches, and certainly not about her occupation. All she had to offer God was a past full of sin and sex. And yet, it was this foreign, pagan, prostitute that is the recipient of God's grace and mercy and kindness. Rahab teaches us that foundation of God's goodness and mercy and grace is GOD – not anything we might bring to the table. God rescues Rahab and redeems her simply out of LOVE. And maybe the two spies had heard about that love before. Maybe they had been taught about it, but now they were seeing it with their own eyes from the most unlikely of people.

The second lesson Rahab teaches us is about what faith looks like lived out. Rahab reminds us that faith is more about trusting than it is knowing. More about a relationship than about memorizing facts. Now, if you can remember, a long time ago, 40 years before, God had sent other spies into the promised land. And even though He had promised to give them the land and wipe out their enemies, the people didn't trust. They doubted. They thought this was all a bad idea. A trap leading to their destruction. God's people couldn't believe God would do what He said He was going to do. The enemies looked to big, too bad, too strong. The circumstances looked overwhelming, impossible. Contrast that with what Rahab says in verse 9, "I know that the Lord has given you this land." Rahab trusts in God's promises where all of

Israel had doubted. She took the Lord at His Word. She had heard the report of God's work and believed. That's faith. Faith clings and holds onto what God has said, even when it seems impossible. Faith trusts in God's goodness even when darkness surrounds you. Listen to this beautiful confession of faith that Rahab makes in verse 11. There she says, "The Lord your God is God in heaven above and on earth below." No more beautiful words had ever been spoken in all of Israel. That's faith. That's a lesson these two men couldn't learn from any book or professor.

Now, if that were all that Rahab had to teach us, I think we could all agree that would be enough. A lesson on God's amazing grace. A lesson about faith in action. But, the story of Rahab has one more nugget for us. And it's a good one.

In our Gospel reading for today we heard part of the genealogy of Jesus. It's one of those passages that sometimes we're tempted to skip over in order to get to the "good stuff". But, we can learn a lot about God from these lists of names.

You see, ancient genealogies were often given for important people in order to prove their purity. Or, in order to show how good of genes they had. Genealogies were used to connect people to the heroes of the past in order to give them some street cred. But, Jesus' genealogy is different. Of course, He's got some of the heroes of the faith. There's Abraham and David and Adam. But, then there's Rahab. The foreign, pagan, non-Jew prostitute is listed today as the great, great...grandmother of our Savior. Jesus is not afraid of uniting Himself to "unclean" people. He considers Himself among the outcasts. He welcomes into His own family people we would never expect. He lifts up the people we push down. In His blood flows the blood of sinners. Like Rahab. And like me and you. Rahab reminds those of us who feel broken and beat down that God is for us. – for even the most unlikely of people. And if He is for us, who can be against us.

Brothers and sisters, God often teaches us in unlikely ways, through unlikely people. Sometimes, yes, through pastors and professors and lectures and all the people we would expect. But, also through the most unlikely of people. Who is that for you? Who are the people in your life that you have closed your ears and your heart to? Because, maybe, just maybe, God is trying to teach you something through them.

In Jesus Name, Amen.