

Sunday August 6, 2023
 Lesson 10: Rahab's Plausible "Truth"
 Scripture: Joshua 2:1-14

Context:

Today we continue our summer curriculum, "Inspired By God." In this first lesson of our third and final unit, "Heroes and Anti-Heroes," we consider how God works through various people who do not fall into neat categories. The concept of heroes and anti-heroes invites us to consider questions of daily ethics and the circumstances which influence how people make decisions. For people of faith, this invites the question: "Where is God in the midst of this situation?" Today's first "hero" to consider is Rahab, found in the book of Joshua. The purpose of today's lesson will be to consider the implications of God's purpose being served by an untruth.

The lesson today is set in the book of Joshua at a time of transition. After the death of Moses, the leadership of the Israelites is passed to Joshua. As seen before in the book of Exodus and Deuteronomy, the Israelites come into the land promised to them only to find others already living there. The leader Joshua must find a way for the people to settle and thus he sends out spies and scouts, searching out for where the people might live. In this early part of the book, we meet Rahab, a prostitute in the walled city of Jericho.

There are many important things which stand out about Rahab, inviting the reader to be aware of her significance. Her importance is suggested by her being named, unlike many other women in the Bible, and also unlike the spies who visit her.¹ Her vocation, a prostitute, is one which certainly rattles the sensibilities of today as well as the values of the Israelites who were given numerous admonitions against prostitution. Yet in our narrative today she becomes the hero (or heroine) and eventually secures a place in both the Jewish and Christian faith as an exemplary figure.

The story goes of how the Israelite spies went into the city, staying at the house of Rahab. When the king finds out, he wants Rahab to turn the men in. Rahab does not tell him they are still with her; instead, she sends the king on a goose chase as she hides the men in her roof. The king's men rush out to search for them as she watches on.

After telling this lie, Rahab speaks to the men about her faith in the Lord and how the Lord is on the side of the Israelites. She has heard of the power of God and her faith in Yahweh leads her to side with the spies against her own people; an act which legitimates the inclusion of her family into the community of Israel.² Eventually the story culminates with the city falling and hints at a battle between Israelites and the leaders of Jericho.³ Rahab and her family are spared and become a part of the larger community of Israel. Later in the Bible, Rahab is part of the genealogy of Jesus as found in the Gospel of Matthew.

¹ Coogan, Michael D., ed., *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 203.

² *Ibid.*, 204.

³ See Joshua 24:11.

Application

Of all the sins and errors which could be committed in our household growing up, I think both my sister and I could attest to how lying was at the top of the list. When we were dishonest, the consequences were far greater than if we had just told the truth. Telling the truth was part of how we were raised.

This virtuous way though is not at the crux of our story as the roles are reversed. In this case, Rahab tells an untruth, and it leads to the escape of spies and the decimation of a city-state. Yet in the larger narrative of Joshua, this untruth leads to the eventual movement of the Israelites into the Promised Land.

Perhaps this is God's way of inviting us to cover truth and untruths in how we make ethical decisions for our lives and God working through it all despite ourselves. All of us, even if raised in household with clear standards, have participated in lying or the more generous term, untruths. There are things where we do not tell the whole story, or we see a greater bigger picture to be revealed. So, we do not reveal every facet of a story or of something we have done like our friend Rahab.

For Rahab, her untruth allowed her to save men and then eventually her family. She was able to see there was indeed the Lord God who ruled, and she would best get in line to join with the Israelites. God took her untruth and thus the people were led to the Promised Land eventually and Rahab became part of the genealogical line of kings, quite a feat for a foreigner and a prostitute.

Yet her decision of untruth made me ask the question: what the times are, if ever, it is okay for one to speak untruths. It's a question I would imagine most of us wrestle with from time to time. Do I tell someone this untruth if it protects them from pain? Do I keep something from someone to protect the ones I love? Do we speak about the concerns or keep them to ourselves for fear of chaos and anxiety?

Recently I thought a lot about untruths in a visit to Europe for my summer holiday. I have always been fascinated by how the various individuals and countries responded when neighbors were being rounded up for being Jewish, gypsies, communists, etc. in the countries overtaken by Nazi Germany. Many of these people were law-abiding citizens, Christians who did what they were told do by authorities.

Yet something clicked with people when they saw individuals' beings harmed or carried away in mysterious circumstances. And thus, they hid their neighbors, or they helped them illegally flee the country. They did not tell the truth to their government officials about their actions. They sought to follow Jesus' great commandment to love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as yourself.

Perhaps this is where we see where untruths might have their greatest importance. Whenever someone is being harmed or hurt and it is condoned by society or authority at large, this is the time to not to tell the full truth of what one thinks or feels but to instead do the right thing. Actions speak louder than words and while one may profess "I love you," it means nothing if it not met with practical steps taken forward.

What I do think happens whether we speak the truth or tell untruths, God will be at work to do things for God's greater purpose. Recently a colleague and I were speaking of some awful behavior we have seen in the church lately and we concluded God will even work through this to do something greater and to reveal where injustice, slander, and manipulation have no place in God's kingdom. God will take peoples' untruths and turn them for God's purpose for the church. God will remind us the Lord God is in charge and while humanity may try to cover things up

with a veneer or self-righteousness and holiness, God will expose those who try to harm or bring division and destruction to God's church.

How have you been raised to see truths and untruths? What was a time you learned from an untruth? Why do you think God works through truths and untruths? Who are people you know who have a good understanding of truth? Where have you seen God work through an untruth for good?

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