

November 14, 2021 An Important Woman Joshua 2:1-21

“My name is Bond...James Bond.” In our culture, when we hear those words we know we have entered the world of espionage. Things will explode, people are going to die, and we know the world is about to change. And the world is in need of being saved.

One of the ways Barbara and I set out to cope with the Pandemic, back in March of 2020, and the call to “go home and stay home,” was that we decided we would watch movies in the evenings together. And we chose to start with the James Bond films. We watched them all. I have a significant number of them in my DVD collection. Those that we did not own, we watched on NETFLIX. We watched them in the order in which they were produced. According to Wikipedia 7 actors have played the character introduced to the world in the novels by Ian Fleming. When we had watched all the films, and some of them were really ridiculous, I decided I would read the original novels. And I did so. It is only my opinion, but I would suggest the novels are better than many of the films. And while I will always think of Sean Connery first when I think of Bond films, I have seriously enjoyed the Piers Brosnan films and the 6 movies starring Daniel Craig. The theme that runs through their work is that the world continually needs saving. James Bond gets the job done.

Joshua chapter 2 places us in the real world, in ancient times. The Hebrews have found their freedom under

the leadership of Moses. But the mantle of leadership has passed to Joshua. And the Hebrews are in search of a homeland. Joshua sent two spies to look over the land and especially the city state of Jericho. When these two men enter the city, they go and enter the house of Rahab. The text says she is a prostitute, although there is a note at the bottom of the page in our pew Bibles that it is possible to translate the word as innkeeper. Frankly I don't take that option very seriously. The NIV used the word prostitute, probably because the KJV did. But even the Good News Bible used the word harlot. These 3 translations were made with a rigorous desire for scholarly accuracy in providing us with meaningful Biblical materials. So the story really starts at that point. The Hebrew spies stayed at the house of Rahab the prostitute.

In spite of their efforts to go unnoticed, word reaches the King of Jericho, that the spies of the Israelites are in the city, and they are spying out the land. They are on a mission. Jericho is a city of interest to the Hebrews. The King of Jericho commands Rahab to turn over her guests. She is in trouble. Jericho is in trouble. And the King of the city obviously wants to interrogate the spies and find out exactly what is happening. The ripple effect of fear is that war is imminent.

That Rahab has survived to this point, is testimony to the fact that she was intelligent. She has hidden the Hebrew spies on the roof top of her home, which is located on one of the city walls. She lies. She provides a cover story, that she cannot produce the men because they have already left the

city. She has no idea where they went, only that they left before the gates of city were closed, locked and guarded for the night. The King of Jericho sends a detail to the fords of the Jordan River in pursuit of the spies. And it follows the detail, fails to find them. Left in her home, Rahab decides it is time to have a serious conversation with her two guests. A conversation about the future.

First of all, she tells them that she understands their conquest of Jericho is a done deal. Everyone in the city is talking about it. They expect the Hebrews to conquer and take the land. Fear has swept through the population like a plague. We should understand what that is like. We have been living in the midst of that experience for the last 2 years. We have all been touched by it. Our lives have been shaped by information, misinformation, and we have observed the craziness that has been part of the times.

Secondly, in addition to the fact that she expects the Hebrews to be victorious, she confesses that she knows the Lord has given the land and the city to them. That is why people are melting in fear. The story of the crossing of the Red Sea has run before this migrating army of Hebrews. They have heard the news of what happened to the kings Sihon and Og. She knows, Rahab knows that the God of the Hebrews is the God of heaven and the earth. She gets it. The world is changing. The Hebrews are coming. And God is leading them, with them, among them.

Thirdly, Rahab is worried about her family, her father and mother, her brothers and sisters. She wants a deal. She wants to be able to save her family in the chaos, the war, and the conquest that she is convinced is coming. And the word of these two spies is given to her. "Our lives for your lives...if you do not tell what we are doing, we will treat you faithfully and kindly when the Lord gives us the land." She helps the spies escape, by a rope from her window. And they in turn give her a piece of scarlet cord to tie in the window so that her home can be identified in the midst of the chaos of battle. There is a condition. Her family must all be in her house in order to be safe. The spies departed, and Rahab tied the scarlet cord in the window.

The rest as they say, is history. Jericho fell. In fact the walls of the city literally fell down so that the great bulwark of defense was a non issue. In fact we are told in chapter 6 of the book of Joshua that the two young men, the spies, went into the city and brought Rahab, her parents, her brothers and sisters and all who belonged to her out so that they were safe. And you may well wonder why we are spending so much time on this particular Sunday talking about Jericho, and spies, and a prostitute named Rahab.

In two weeks time, on Sunday the 28th of November we will begin the season of Advent. We will start to sing Christmas carols as the hymns that are part of our worship services in preparation for the celebration of Christmas. The world is changing. And the world needs saving. Matthew's

Gospel begins with a family tree, I you will, of Jesus. The famous list of begats. In the 5th verse of Matthew chapter 1, we find these words: “Salmon was the father of Boaz, whose mother was....Rahab.” She was an important woman, and is to be remembered as an important woman. She is part of the string of generations which would result in “Jacob, the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called the Christ.” (Matthew 1:16)

Rahab, the prostitute, maybe an innkeeper, recognized that the hand of God was changing the world in which she lived. She had heard the news of the time, how the Hebrews swept away the kings Sihon and Og after they crossed the Red Sea on dry land because god provided them a way when no escape was possible from the pursuing charioteers of the Egyptian war machine. Rahab knew that the land and the city of Jericho had been given to the Hebrews by God, when many of the Hebrews doubted the possibility. Salmon was the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab of Jericho. A sinner? Of course! We all are. An intelligent woman who believed God was guiding the Hebrews, making a way for them, unfolding HIS plan for saving the world. Definitely.

Rahab is in the list of those who were part of the family tree from which we received Jesus, who is the Christ. You can say a lot of things about Rahab. But you must say this: She believed. She experienced the hand of God on her life. That she and her whole family could be saved. That is why she is a very important woman.

Let us pray;

Lord God we thank you for the bits and pieces we know about Rahab. Those bits and pieces point us toward you, toward Jesus, toward your Holy Spirit's presence in the midst of the real world in which we live. Your touching the life of Rahab reminds us that you touch our lives too. We see in her the significance of our own weak and trembling faith. That all we need is a quantity the size of mustard seed. That we may be cleansed of our sin, and may serve your high and holy purposes. As we begin the journey toward Advent and Christmas this year, fill us with wonder and make our cup of joy overflow. In Jesus name we pray. Amen