

GOD CAN SAVE ANYBODY

Joshua 2:8-21 | Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost | September 4/7, 2014

“Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you.”

Jesus

My dear fellow sinners and fellow redeemed,

“The church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints.” The jury is still out on who originally came up with that saying. Some say the ancient church father St. Augustine. Some say George Craig Stewart, bishop of Chicago in the early part of the twentieth century. Still others say Abigail Van Buren. That’s right, Dear Abby. In her March 29, 1964 column, she wrote these words as part of her answer to a couple who were living in sin and who didn’t feel worthy to go to any church.

“The church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints.” Interesting. Do you think Rahab, a prostitute and pagan citizen of an unbelieving city, felt worthy of God’s grace? Should you feel worthy of God’s grace? Should I? As Jacob fearfully awaited a reunion with his brother Esau he prayed to the Lord: **“I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant”** (Genesis 32:10). He was right. Jesus said that even when we have done our best we are still **“unworthy servants”** (Luke 17:10). Truly, that is what we are. But the portion of God’s Word before us today is crystal clear: God is gracious. God has mercy on the unworthy. GOD CAN SAVE ANYBODY.

He can save a pagan prostitute! He can even you and me!

I. Even a Pagan Prostitute

Moses, God’s faithful servant who led Israel through forty years of desert wandering, was dead and buried. Joshua, Moses’ aid, was God’s choice to lead his chosen people into the Promised Land. But before the army of Israel entered Canaan, Joshua secretly sent two spies, to check the situation out. They were to pay special attention to Jericho, an important city that militarily was the key to conquering the rest of Canaan.

The spies entered the house of Rahab, a woman employed in “the world’s oldest profession.” Why did they go to the house of a prostitute? For one thing, it was a good place to hide. Since many foreigners would be found there the spies could blend in. In addition, because so many people passed through it, it was a great place to gain information, which is exactly what they were after. Also, Rahab’s house was built on or in the wall of the city. This would allow for a quick escape if necessary. And we dare not forget: God had big plan for Rahab. His grace brought those spies to her door.

It didn't take long for the spies' cover to be blown. So Rahab hid them under stalks of flax, and covered for them when the authorities came calling.

Why did she do that? Why did Rahab hide spies from an enemy nation? She had told them, **"All who live in this country are melting in fear because of you."** Everyone knew that mighty Israel was going to wipe them out. Did she hide the spies merely to secure a better outcome for herself and her family, or was there a deeper motivation? Let's look at the evidence.

Four times in our text she uses the name *Yahweh*, the LORD. This is not a generic name for any god. Nor is it a name that stresses God's mighty power. It's the name that stresses God's grace. Rahab used his Savior name. She also said, **"The Lord your God is God in heaven above and on earth below."** She recognized God as the Lord and Creator of all things. That's pretty remarkable when you consider who she was and where she lived.

Rahab did something else. She made the spies swear an oath on the Lord's name. She considered this oath binding. She tied her future safety to this solemn oath.

All these things indicate that this woman was no longer a pagan worshiper of Canaan's idols. She was a believer in the one true God.

And if the evidence of our text doesn't convince you, let's move to the New Testament. James uses Rahab as an illustration of faith expressing itself in

good works – **Was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead** (2:25-26). In Hebrews chapter 11, Rahab is listed with the likes of Noah, Moses, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in the great hall of the heroes of faith: **By faith, the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient** (verse 31).

Rahab even became a part of the Son of David's family line. Matthew's genealogy reads: **Salmon, the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the Father of King David** (1:5-6). Our Savior, according to his human ancestry, descended from a prostitute! What a profound illustration of God's grace!

Truly, God can save anybody. A lady of the evening working the streets of ancient Jericho became a servant of the one true God, a believer in the promised Savior, and a vital link in his family line. How unlikely that a Canaanite call girl would end up in the Bible's hall of heroes! But that's the kind of God we have. He sent his Son to seek and save the lost. That Son spent time with prostitutes and tax collectors because he came into the world to save sinners. And he can save anybody.

II. Even You and Me!

If Rahab's story leaves your mouth hanging open in wonder at God's grace,

just consider this: Not only did God save Rahab, but of all people, he saved you and he saved me.

I know what you're thinking: *Well, Pastor, I'm no Rahab. I'm not that bad.* We love to play the comparison game. We've gotten pretty good at noticing the sins of others while sweeping ours under the rug, at removing the speck and ignoring the beam. We look down on those sickos who would peek at leaked photos of naked actresses on the Internet, but conveniently ignore the lust that festers in our own hearts. We criticize those whose foul language would make a longshoreman blush, but forget how often we use our words to lie and hurt and tear others down. We are shocked by the murder and mayhem we see on the evening news, but hardly notice how often the hatred in our own hearts puts imaginary crosshairs on our fellow human beings. We condemn parents who abuse their children and football players who beat up their wives, but disregard our own daily failures as moms and dads, husbands and wives.

Here's the problem with the comparison game: God never said, "Find someone worse than you." That's easy. There's always someone who sins more spectacularly than we do. He said, **"Be holy, because I the Lord your God am holy"** (Leviticus 19:2). That's hard. In fact, that's impossible.

But that impossible goal has never changed; God has not lowered his standards. You're no Rahab, you say? Not

so fast. You and I are just like Rahab. By nature, totally depraved, dead in transgressions and sins. By birth blind to the ways of God, hopelessly helpless if left on our own. We are unworthy of God's kindness and compassion. We deserve only his holy frown and eternal rejection.

But, remember, God can save anybody. The God who made David, a murderous adulterer, into a **"man after his own heart,"** the God who turned Saul the persecutor into Paul the preacher, the God who made an unbelieving harlot into the faithful ancestress of the Savior, has made you and me his dear forgiven children, holy priests in his service, heirs of eternal life in heaven.

It wasn't easy. In fact, it cost him dearly. But he willingly paid the price for us. See the cost of our salvation in the manger. God himself in human flesh. The Almighty as a helpless babe, born to take our place.

See the cost in his perfect life. He fulfilled the whole law. He kept every command. Every moment of every day he lived in perfect love and sinless obedience. He is what we aren't and what we can't be: holy as God is holy.

See the cost on Golgotha. A holy man, shamed and punished as the worst of sinners. True God, dying in our place, shedding blood precious enough to pay for a world's sin. Our great High Priest sacrificing himself to remove our guilt and the hell that it earns.

See the cost at the tomb. The Lord of life cold in death. God's only Son lying in a

borrowed grave. But such a scene couldn't last. God would not let his Holy One see decay. Jesus rose! Jesus lives! His empty tomb confirms that God accepted the payment, that our every sin is forgiven, and that a place in heaven has been reserved even for the likes of you and me.

God can save anybody. Prostitutes and tax collectors, farmers and factory workers, pastors and teachers, moms and dads, husbands and wives, sons and daughters. Jesus earned forgiveness for all people – every man, woman and child, past, present and future.

Think of what that means. Not only did Jesus live and die for you but for everyone you meet. **“God so loved the world ... Whoever believes in him will not perish.”** The world! Whoever! That means everybody is a mission opportunity. Every single person is someone for whom Jesus left his throne, shed his blood and emptied his tomb.

Your neighbor who gets drunk every Saturday night and says things that make you cover your kid's ears. The lady who always kindly leaves her dog's mess on your front lawn. Your college professor who ridicules your faith. Your brother who's shackled up with his girlfriend. Your cousin who came out of the closet. Your co-worker who has never set foot in a church in his life.

God can save anybody. What a joy to share the message of his saving love with our neighbors, people who are just like us! Sinners by nature. Forgiven by grace.

“The church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints.” We don't come here each week to show off, to brag about our accomplishments, to proclaim how great we are. We come as the walking wounded, battered and bloody from the daily struggle against sin, self and Satan. We come here for peace and pardon. We come here for strength and encouragement. We come here with our fellow sinners, hot messes every one, because God can save anybody. My friends, in Jesus, he even saved us. Amen.

S.D.G.