

EASTSIDE COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH
SUNDAY, AUGUST 29, 2021
SERMON: GOD'S DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH
TEXT: JOSHUA 2:1-1-24

If you had a birthday party and your best friend in the whole world brought you a gift, you opened it, and in it was a bag of rocks...you might be unimpressed. You do the socially acceptable thing, and you thank your friend, and you move on to your other gifts. Later that night you grab this bag of rocks and see that the rocks you have are "kimberlite" from the town of Kimberly, South Africa. You flip over the tag, and it tells you start breaking the rock with a hammer. You work out a few of your frustrations by banging on the rocks when you suddenly notice something. Within the rocks you start seeing something else. You see a different type of stone that looks a bit dull, has a yellowish tint to it and isn't quite clear but seems to be unique. You decide to take a couple of these rocks to your favorite jeweler, and he tells you to leave them with him. You almost forget about the rocks and move on with the business of the weeks ahead. A month later you go back to your jeweler, and he presents you with beautifully shined, cut diamonds ready to be made into spectacular works of art. You have just experienced find a "diamond in the rough."

In our vocabulary today, a "diamond in the rough" is used to describe persons who are ***genuinely good at heart, but they lack manners and proper social upbringing. It is also said about persons who are harsh by appearances, which hide their good and positive qualities. However, such persons use their humility and bring change in their characters, turning them to a diamond.***

When we examine how God works in our world, you soon realize that God is in the business of using "diamonds in the rough" for his Kingdom and for His glory.

Today we are going to engage in a bit of a character sketch of a “diamond in the rough” found in the character of Rahab, the pagan Canaanite prostitute from the wrong side of the Jordan, who found her way into the line of David and thus into the genealogy of Jesus.

Let’s start with our scripture lesson from Joshua 2:1-24:

2 Then Joshua secretly sent out two spies from the Israelite camp at Acacia Grove. He instructed them, “Scout out the land on the other side of the Jordan River, especially around Jericho.” So the two men set out and came to the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there that night.

² But someone told the king of Jericho, “Some Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land.” ³ So the king of Jericho sent orders to Rahab: “Bring out the men who have come into your house, for they have come here to spy out the whole land.”

⁴ Rahab had hidden the two men, but she replied, “Yes, the men were here earlier, but I didn’t know where they were from. ⁵ They left the town at dusk, as the gates were about to close. I don’t know where they went. If you hurry, you can probably catch up with them.” ⁶ (Actually, she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them beneath bundles of flax she had laid out.) ⁷ So the king’s men went looking for the spies along the road leading to the shallow crossings of the Jordan River. And as soon as the king’s men had left, the gate of Jericho was shut.

⁸ Before the spies went to sleep that night, Rahab went up on the roof to talk with them. ⁹ “I know the LORD has given you this land,” she told them. “We are all afraid of you. Everyone in the land is living in terror. ¹⁰ For we have heard how the LORD made a dry path for you through the Red Sea when you left Egypt. And we know what you did to Sihon and Og, the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan River,

whose people you completely destroyed. ¹¹ 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 and the earth below.

¹² “Now swear to me by the LORD that you will be kind to me and my family since I have helped you. Give me some guarantee that ¹³ when Jericho is conquered, you will let me live, along with my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all their families.”

¹⁴ “We offer our own lives as a guarantee for your safety,” the men agreed. “If you don’t betray us, we will keep our promise and be kind to you when the LORD gives us the land.”

¹⁵ Then, since Rahab’s house was built into the town wall, she let them down by a rope through the window. ¹⁶ “Escape to the hill country,” she told them. “Hide there for three days from the men searching for you. Then, when they have returned, you can go on your way.”

¹⁷ Before they left, the men told her, “We will be bound by the oath we have taken only if you follow these instructions. ¹⁸ When we come into the land, you must leave this scarlet rope hanging from the window through which you let us down. And all your family members—your father, mother, brothers, and all your relatives—must be here inside the house. ¹⁹ If they go out into the street and are killed, it will not be our fault. But if anyone lays a hand on people inside this house, we will accept the responsibility for their death. ²⁰ If you betray us, however, we are not bound by this oath in any way.”

²¹ “I accept your terms,” she replied. And she sent them on their way, leaving the scarlet rope hanging from the window.

²² The spies went up into the hill country and stayed there three days. The men who were chasing them searched everywhere along the road, but they finally returned without success.

²³ Then the two spies came down from the hill country, crossed the Jordan River, and reported to Joshua all that had happened to them. ²⁴ “The LORD has given us the whole land,” they said, “for all the people in the land are terrified of us.”

Moses has died, Joshua has mourned, God intervened to move Joshua to action as the newly minted leader of the Children of Israel. After 40 years of wondering in the Sinai desert, it is now time to cross the Jordan river and settle the Promised Land! So Joshua WAITS! We are told that Joshua takes a page from Moses' handbook and sends, instead of twelve, two spies to get the lay of the land, especially the first major city of Jericho.

The two make their way to Jericho and choose to lay low at the house of Rahab, who is a prostitute. Why stay with a prostitute? Perhaps it was to blend in and not be found out, as it would be normal to see strangers coming and going often from her house.

Either the spies weren't terribly good at blending in or the people of Jericho were looking for Israelites to cross the Jordan...but word soon made its way to the king and the search was on. We have just heard the story of how Rahab saved the lives of the spies and cut herself (and her family) a deal to save their lives when the time came for Israel to take Jericho.

Rahab – a woman with so much going against her – why would God choose to use someone like her?

REASONS AGAINST HER

If you start looking at who Rahab was, you might think that there was an awful lot going against her.

1. Rahab was Canaanite.

Rahab was not an Israelite. Wasn't it wrong for the people to mix with the non-Israelite people? The answer to that is "yes" and "no." The rule instituted about marrying outside of the faith and not making alliances with the inhabitants of the land were not meant to keep people **out** but rather to keep **evil practices** out that would lead the people into sin. There were groups, other than the Israelites that worshipped God like Melchizedek, who was a high priest of God in Genesis 14. Some of these believers in the Yahweh were grafted into the Children of Israel and became receivers of the blessings of God.

2. Rahab was a woman.

During this time period, much of the world was patriarchal and male controlled. Women had very few rights and were considered property. We need to remember that just because worldly societies were patriarchal, and sadly we still see it today, that God has always celebrated women. He has worked through the worldly and sinful ideas that have even found their way into the hearts and minds of His children to bring around what is right and proper. There are so many examples of how God has used woman in ministry and leadership to increase His Kingdom. In God's eyes, men and women are equal, valued, and created for kingdom service. God saw potential in Rahab and chose to use her.

3. Rahab was a prostitute.

So she wasn't an Israelite – not everyone can be one! So she was a woman in a chauvinistic world. God saw her potential! Doesn't being a prostitute present far too many problems? Over the years, some pastors and teachers have suggested that Rahab was, what is called, a temple prostitute. A temple prostitute was tied to the pagan religious rituals tied to the Canaanite worship of fertility gods who they believe controlled both human fertility and agricultural fertility by providing bountiful harvests for those who pleased them.

Somehow this distinction might make Rahab more “respectable.” The fact is that it might be pushing it to make her a temple prostitute because in Hebrew there is a different word for that type of position and it is not used when describing Rahab.

The reality is that Rahab was probably from a poor family. For a woman, there was not much opportunity to make a lot of money, so she sold herself. We are told that she hid the spies under bales of flax that were on her roof. This probably means that her family used the flax to make linen that was then sold to those who could afford it.

What a God-given gift to us all to know that God can take the broken, the wounded, the struggling, those who might find themselves on the fringe of society and transform them into individuals valued and used by God. God has a purpose for each one of us regardless of our struggles. Paul reminds us of this in Ephesians 2:10:

¹⁰ For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

When you give yourself over to Jesus and make Him Lord and Saviour. When you find forgiveness for your sin and choose to follow His will, then God has prepared a place for you in His service and in His kingdom. You have moved from your old life to your new life that God created for you. Are you worried that you will stumble, that you will fail, that you are still too wounded to be useful? Look to Rahab and see how God transformed her and used, not only herself, but her family. There is not doubt that God transformed Rahab because of her willingness to join the Israelites and follow the God. How did God bless Rahab? Listen to these scriptures:

In Matthew 1 we find the genealogy of Jesus and we read in verses 5-6:

⁵ 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.

⁶ Jesse was the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon (whose mother was Bathsheba, the widow of Uriah).

Rahab is King David's great, great grandmother and in the line of Jesus.

Rahab is also mentioned, with great honour, in the New Testament. In the "Hall of Faith" found in Hebrews 11, we read in verse 31:

³¹ It was by faith that Rahab the prostitute was not destroyed with the people in her city who refused to obey God. For she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

In James 2:25 we read:

²⁵ Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was shown to be right with God by her actions when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road.

CONCLUSION

Diamonds in the rough are all around us. God chooses to use those who, on the surface, seem rough. For those of us who have found a forgiveness and a new life in Christ, we must now be diligent not to dismiss those whom God leads us to who don't seem to fit our ideal version of a Christian or one who would serve side-by-side with us in God's kingdom. Sadly we have a long history of dismissing our children, the elderly, those who have rough edges and not-so-pure backgrounds. We judge those seeking to find the truth instead of being an encouragement and help. May we seek

to see all people as Jesus sees them and may we do our part, through the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit, to aid in the refining process of God's "diamonds in the rough" until we see our Saviour face-to-face.

Let's pray...