

To God Alone Be The Glory

We've heard several times this morning that Christ's Gospel Calls to ALL Nations. But did God always want all people to be connected to him by faith? Some parts of the Old Testament can make it seem like God wanted only the Israelites. But read through all 150 Psalms, and note all the verses where God calls out to all the nations to believe in him—today's Verse of the Day (Psalm 117) is a great example. So is today's Old Testament lesson (Isaiah 56:1,6-8). Maybe you know that when the Israelites left Egypt, quite a number of Egyptians went with them (see Numbers 11:4). Moses' wife was also a foreigner. So even in Old Testament times, God wanted all people to be saved through faith in the Messiah.

This morning we join the children of Israel after 40 years of wandering in the desert. It is finally time for them to take possession of the land the Lord has promised them. Moses just recently died. Israel's new leader is Joshua. He is a military man. Joshua is to decide where to attack the Canaanites first, so he sends two spies on a reconnaissance mission.

Some of you may be saying, "Uh-oh! Didn't the Israelites try this spy trick about 39 years ago? Didn't those spies bring back a bad report that filled the Israelite people with fear and doubt about whether they could take the Promised Land? Didn't the Israelites then rebel against the Lord, which resulted in four decades of wandering in the desert?"

Yes, all that's true. But remember: Joshua was one of those original twelve spies. He was one of the two who filed the minority report asserting that the Lord Almighty would help them take the Promised Land. Besides Moses used spies at other times successfully (Numbers 21:32). Spies can be a good tool. For this mission Joshua sends just two spies. And he sends them secretly. This way, if they come back with a bad report, only he will know. Joshua tells them to focus their recon on Jericho.

"What's the matter with Joshua? Doesn't he trust the Lord?" Sure he does. But the Lord doesn't want us to sit back lazy-like and presume that he will do all the work. He does that only with salvation. For everything else he expects us to do our research and make our plans and work hard at those things which are pleasing to him.

When the two spies get to Jericho, they enter the house of a prostitute named Rahab. "Uh, that does not sound like a good idea." Well, not if they go there to break the 6th Commandment. But what if they are there for cover? Two young men from out of town hooking up with some prostitutes might seem like normal behavior to the ungodly. Besides can you think of a better place to pick up information without arousing suspicion? Since prostitutes aren't known for their high moral standards, perhaps this Rahab might not feel a moral obligation to report these information-seekers to her king. But read between the lines and notice that the

Lord seems to direct the spies to Rahab's house, as if he's got plans for her. More about that later.

Some people try to make it seem that Rahab is an innkeeper, not a prostitute. But two New Testament passages definitely call her a prostitute (Hebrews 11:31, James 2:25). It is a sin to take sex outside of marriage. But in his mercy the Lord planned to rescue Rahab from all her sins, like he wants to rescue you and me from all our sins. As the story unfolds, watch how the Lord brings Rahab to faith in him, and WATCH RAHAB'S FAITH REVEAL ITSELF.

Meanwhile the king of Jericho hears: Israelite men have come to spy out the land. He sends guards to Rahab's house to arrest the spies. But Rahab tells the king's men, *"Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from. At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, the men left. I don't know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them."* But [Rahab] had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out up there (Joshua 2:4-6). Out rush the pursuers into the night. "Bang" slam the city gates behind them. Whew! Spies safe. Disaster averted. More importantly Rahab's faith just revealed itself.

"But wait. Didn't Rahab tell a lie?" Yes. And although she's never specifically commended for lying, she is commended three times in the Bible for how she treated the spies. She kept the 5th Commandment by protecting their lives.

This is where our Old Testament lesson picks up the story. Watch: Rahab's faith is about to reveal itself again. *8Before the spies lay down for the night, [Rahab goes] up on the roof 9and [says] to them, "I know that the LORD has given this land to you [Israelites] and that a great fear of you has fallen on us [Canaanites], so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. 10We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt [40 years ago], and what you [recently] did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan [River], whom you completely destroyed. 11When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below."*

Isn't that simply astounding!?! Just look at the facts from two points of view. First, if you're an Israelite, it's a wonderful thing that the Lord dried up the Red Sea. It's a wonderful thing that the Lord handed you a victory over the two armies of Sihon and Og who recently attacked you (see Numbers 21). Two and a half of the twelve tribes have already settled in the lands of those Amorite kings and now have their rest. But look at these same facts from the point of view of the Canaanites. They are thinking: "If the God of the Israelites can dry up the Red Sea, he is powerful. If the Lord and his people fight against us, we're going to lose. We will be completely destroyed. We are going to die." No wonder the hearts of the Canaanites are melting in fear! God's

judgments on sin are intended to bring out the fear in people's hearts.

But not in Rahab's. That is, she didn't stay afraid. She could see that the sinful path she was on would lead to her destruction. By some miracle that only the Holy Spirit can fully explain, Rahab's fear was converted to respect for the Lord and his power. Her heart trusted in this God who was powerful enough to end her life. She longed to be on his side. When the Lord presented her with the opportunity to show her faith by switching sides, she took it. Now you can see why the Lord would direct the Israelite spies to Rahab's house of ill repute. He planned to save a prostitute from hell. It's working. Listen to Rahab's faith reveal itself some more.

12 "Now then, please swear to me by the LORD. Take an oath in the Lord's name. Then I'll know you're telling the truth when you promise that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign 13 that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and that you will save us from death."

Isn't that simply astounding? Rahab doesn't think like people today who find fault with God for telling Israel to wipe out the Canaanites. She simply accepts that God has the right to punish sin, and especially unrepentant sinners. But today people are so disrespectful of the Lord, so unafraid of him that they blame him when bad things happen, rather than repenting of all sin and turning to him for mercy in Christ.

Rahab didn't even know about Jesus, like all of you do. This makes her faith all the more astounding! How would she even imagine that she could find refuge in a nation that was clearly bent on wiping out her own people? It's not reasonable. And how could the Canaanite woman in today's Gospel think that Jesus would heal her daughter, especially after he insinuated that she was a dog? —and, no, they were not dog lovers back then like so many of us are today. How? It's not reasonable to hope for mercy from a God who clearly hates sin.

No, but that's faith. Faith trusts. It just trusts in the true God. It can't help it. That's what faith does, all the more so when you know the Lord Jesus loved us enough to pay the penalty for our sins on the cross.

Rahab's faith in the one true God was evident to the spies. *14 "Our lives for your lives!" the men assured her. "If you don't tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the LORD gives us the land."* How did she know they weren't lying to her just to get away? After all, they're spies. Maybe Rahab asks herself this question, but then her faith can respond, "Hush now. They swore an oath in the name of the God who dried up the Red Sea. He will not let them get away with breaking their oath." See how faith reveals itself? Faith just trusts. That's what it does.

15 So [Rahab] let [the spies] down by a rope through the window, for the house she

lived in was strategically located. It was part of the city wall. ¹⁶Now she had said to them, “Go the opposite way into the hills so the pursuers will not find you. Hide yourselves there three days until they return, and then go on your way.” Good advice! She’s still looking out for them. More evidence of her faith in the one true God.

¹⁷The men said to her, “This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us ¹⁸unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you have brought your father and mother, your brothers and all your family into your house. ¹⁹If anyone goes outside your house into the street, his blood will be on his own head; we will not be responsible. As for anyone who is in the house with you, his blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on him. ²⁰But if you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you made us swear.” See, the men are working out their trust issues too, but it still boils down to trust. ²¹*“Agreed,” she replied. “Let it be as you say.” So she sent them away and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window, once again revealing that she believes in the Lord.*

Why would the Lord save a prostitute? Same reason he would save you and me: because we’re sinners and he is full of grace and mercy. He loves to pull us close when we stray away. And every

time he brings us back, he wants us to serve him. Find a way to put your skills to work for the Lord and his gospel. Let your faith in Jesus show. Be a great neighbor, an awesome worker, a faithful friend, an excellent spouse or parent or child, a good student, a loyal and obedient citizen. Find a way to show compassion, or to pray for others, or to be active in spreading the good news about Jesus, even if your role is behind the scenes. You never know when the Lord will decide to thrust greatness on you, like he did when he worked through Rahab.

How did things turn out for Rahab? Those spies told Joshua what they had promised her. He concurred with their oath. When it was time for the walls of Jericho to come a-tumblin’ down, the two spies went straight to Rahab’s house and protected her family from the judgment God sent on all the other inhabitants. At first Rahab lived on the outskirts of Israel’s camp. But eventually she married into the tribe of Judah. But not just any family. It just so happens, she married into the family line of the Savior Jesus. Do you get the message? Jesus was born from a line of sinners that included foreigners because he always wanted to save all sinners and foreigners. This is why we welcome all sinners at St John’s. Rahab calls out to people of ALL nations: I found a home among God’s people; so will you.