

bravery; we're calling it faith and courage. But it's all pretty similar. She talks about heartbreaking, tough, family moments, like when your kid was dropped from a group text, or your husband blew the big deal at work, or your mom won't wear the Depends that would really help her. Things there are no good solutions for, where it's unclear how to really help, and everything feels so difficult. Or like when your loved one says, "I can't stop making bets online. I started using again. He hurt me. I cut myself. I can't do it anymore." Corrigan says, in those situations, "Bravery is the great guts to move closer to the wound, as composed as a war nurse, holding eye contact and saying, 'Tell me more. What else? Go on.' That's all the brave do. That's how they shine. Even if they're scared of what might happen next, even if they have no training or experience to prepare them for this moment, even if it's late and they have an early flight. In a family, bravery is mostly just sitting there, with a posture that communicates, 'I can hear anything you want to tell me.' The brave hang around. They are available and ready to bear witness." In the end, she says, "To *do* love and to be love, that's brave."²

There is one more reference in the New Testament to Rahab. It's in the gospel of Matthew, the first chapter. Matthew has a long listing of ancestors of Jesus; Jesus' genealogy. And Rahab's name is there, in black and white: a prostitute, an outsider, one who lied to her King. And, of course, someone who decided to trust God at a crucial moment. Someone who knew there would be fallout for her decisions, but who tried to rescue the people she could, the people she loved. Someone who laid it all on the line, not knowing how things would turn out. It's important that a person like Rahab is in the family line of Jesus. *Her* presence there tells us something about *him*. About how we can understand Jesus' faith and courage when he decided to stick with God in the face of impossible life or death choices. About how he was brave because he *did* love and he *was* love.

Rahab and Jesus faced hard choices in the midst of impossibly complex situations. Each of us are sometimes faced with really difficult situations, where there are few, if any, good choices. Perhaps our calling is not to try to figure out a right solution or the perfect words or actions. But instead to summon deep faith in God in the midst of it. And to live with a lot of courage, which looks something like that brave love that draws close and listens. Just the way our faithful and courageous God draws close and listens to us.

All glory and honor, thanks and praise be to God. Amen.



First Presbyterian Church
of Royal Oak

August 25, 2024
Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
"Faith and Courage"
Rev. Emma Nickel
Scripture: Joshua 2:1-21a

Today we meet our hero, Rahab. Perhaps on the surface she seems an odd choice to help us think about how we want to live, what it looks like to follow God. Is she actually a role model? She was an outsider, not a member of God's people Israel. She's described as a prostitute. She lied to her king. And while she and her own family's lives were saved, the lives of all the people in her Canaanite city were lost. And yet, it was *this* woman, who bravely acknowledged the power and majesty of God: "The LORD your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below."

She said those words at a pivotal moment in this long thread in the story of God and God's people. The people were getting ready to establish their land at God's behest. But of course, that land was already populated by Canaanites, who had to be moved or killed or otherwise dealt with, in order for the people Israel to inhabit it. This land was not an empty place where the covenant people could begin again with a clean slate. We cannot ignore this fact, even as we recognize there is no easy way to understand these charged and somewhat traumatic parts of God's story and of our faith. Naming that out loud, and the way this particular Bible story has impacted societies since, is one small place to begin.

We pick up with the story when the two spies entered the city of Jericho. The first thing they did was go to Rahab's house. Which should give us pause. Being as Rahab was a harlot, as some like to call her, either these guys didn't understand what it meant to stay undercover, or they mistakenly thought they could mix business and pleasure. Rahab likely did not do this work because she wanted to. Then, as now, economics was a main reason people turned to prostitution. Rahab's family was probably in debt, and she had entered this line of work to ensure they could still put food on the table. It's possible the spies came to her home because it was an easy location where they could hear the scuttlebutt on activities in the city. But the scripture didn't say they asked any questions or listened in on any conversations. Whatever drew those spies to Rahab's home, they were found out immediately. The King got word of them and ordered Rahab to turn over the spies.

There was Rahab, in the midst of wolves, everyone trying to get her. The king and his cohort on one side; the Israelite spies who were planning to rampage her

1 "Miep Gies," AFS Amsterdam/AFF Basel—Reproduced by permission from the Anne Frank Trust UK, <https://www.hmd.org.uk/resource/miep-gies/#:-:text=It%20was%20Miep%20Gies%2C%20Otto's,time%2C%20always%20living%20in%20fear>

2 Kelly Corrigan, "To Love is the Be Brave," TED Talk, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ShZKR5Uo2I>

city on the other. There were no good choices for her now—get arrested by the king for not complying or wait for her city to be destroyed by God’s people. So, if it was possible, she was going to have to be wise as a serpent and innocent as a dove, as Jesus once said. I wonder if there had ever been a time when Rahab had good choices in front of her? If her family was poor, she may have had no other option but to enter her profession. She may have seen no way out of it in her future. So Rahab gathered her courage. She made the one decision she could that offered hope and protection to those in her care, her own family. We believe that it is God who kindles faith in us. And if that is so, then surely it was God that kindled faith in Rahab and allowed her to courageously act to protect herself and those she loved.

She sent the King’s troops on a wild goose chase, while the spies were securely hidden on her rooftop. And then, when it was safe, she went to them and explained that she had heard the stories of God’s power, of how God had freed the people from slavery, protected them across the Red Sea. She had also heard that the people themselves had been violent against other kings. She declared that she and the Canaanites in Jericho were rightly afraid of them, knowing just who they were up against. So Rahab made a promise—a promise to protect and save the spies. She promised to be trustworthy and asked that they do the same, and thereby protect her family. They all agreed and the spies told her to put a crimson cord in her window as the sign that her family should be spared, when the invasion came. That red cord echoes the blood of the lamb that the Israelite people had placed above their doors at Passover when they were still in Egypt, asking that God protect their children when the plague came. That action spared Rahab’s family and led God’s people to their intended outcomes, beginning to settle in the land.

Faith and courage. That was what Rahab displayed in that impossible situation. New Testament writers agreed. Her name is mentioned in several different books. The writer of Hebrews says, “By faith Rahab did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace.” The book of James explains, “You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. Rahab was justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another road.” These early Christians praised Rahab for her faith—for her head-belief and heart-feelings toward God. They also celebrated her for her actions—for thinking quickly and offering protection for those who served God. They recognized her faith and courage. Theologians across the centuries have looked with praise on the character of Rahab, lifting up this ‘outsider’ who lived by faith and lived out her faith.

Faith and courage are to be admired. They’re the kind of words we embroider on a pillow or write on a sticky note that we see everyday for encouragement. It’s one thing to have courageous faith when everything is hunky-dory. But living with true faith and courage when the odds are against us, when the outlook is poor—that is when those traits really count. That is when we deepen our hope in God and plumb the depths of our trust in God’s promises.

Rahab demonstrated faith and courage in the face of threats and distress. She sided with God when none of the options were terribly good ones; when any choice she could make resulted in a threat to someone’s life. She chose to offer protection to the people she could when all signs pointed toward destruction for her city. She took a risk on trusting people who may not have been that trustworthy. She went up against the most powerful person in her land, the King. Faith and courage are that much more astounding when the world is falling apart around you.

To live with faith and courage often comes with a high cost or a big sacrifice. Sometimes it is risky or dangerous. Because as beautiful as it sounds, these are not values that the systems of our world prioritize. And so, like Rahab, we have to dig deeply to discover the depth of our bravery. We have to dig deep into our hearts to live out the kind of faith in God that makes a difference in hard times.

Throughout history, other people have done the kind of thing Rahab did—caring for people who were in danger, while risking their own lives. People who opened their homes on the Underground Railroad. People who shield neighbors in the face of genocide. People who provide water to migrants at the Southern Border, prioritizing human life over issues of legality. Miep Gies is the hero who sheltered Anne Frank and her Jewish family from the Nazis in Holland, for as long as she possibly could. Miep endangered her own life to save the lives of her boss, Otto Frank, and his family, which included his daughters Anne and Margot. Miep sourced food for them, often making multiple separate trips, so she wasn’t seen carrying too many groceries. She didn’t even tell her own family what she was doing, in order to protect the Frank family’s lives. She did all that, because, as Miep remembers, “We did our duty as human beings: helping people in need.”¹ She did that even at great risk and cost to herself, even when there were no good choices in front of her. Though Miep could not, in the end, save the whole family, what deep trust she displayed, what heroic action she took, what hope she held, when all hope seemed lost. She showed faith and courage in an impossible situation.

Politics and world events often present us with terrible situations where there are no good solutions. That’s what happened to Rahab and Anne and Miep. We never know when our own faith and courage might be put to the test in those ways. But impossible situations happen much closer to home, too, in our families and our circles of people. I bet most of us have faced some situation where there were no good choices, no clear path to resolution; where things were just bad and hard and it felt like hope was running out. Like the choice of how to care for a spouse or parent with dementia when you cannot care for them at home anymore. Or you’re at the end of the rope with a grown child who is making decisions that you cannot support, but from whom you also cannot imagine pulling away.

Kelly Corrigan is an author of a number of books about family life, and she hosts several interview programs on television and radio. She recently gave a TED talk, which is a short speech about something meaningful on which the speaker has expertise. Her talk was called “To Love is to Be Brave.” She calls it