

Perfectly Usable Imperfect People
Joshua 2:1-11
Rev. Jonathan Cornell
5/3/2020

Amen, and would you pray with me? *Let the good news come now Father, not only in Word but also in power and with great assurance. Remind us Lord how, when crossing life's rivers into new lands, we do not do it alone and under our own strength, but with your strength revealed through others, even those we least expect. Draw us closer to your very heart by revealing the wideness and expansiveness of your plan of grace. And we pray O God not in our own strength, but in the strong name of Jesus the Christ who is our savior and Lord, Amen and Amen.*

We are continuing through the month of August and the first part of September in a series called "Crossing Life's Rivers." And after a few weeks in the book of Joshua I would amend that title just a bit for it to read this way "Crossing Life's Rivers, with God." The whole purpose of our look at Joshua as he led the Israelites across the Jordan River is simply this: following God requires obedience, but in return for obedience God offers strength. You and I need that strength to trust God, because at the point of intersection between God's loving plan and our lives is sometimes messy. Let me explain what I mean by this: the people and the experiences that most profoundly shape us are often not what we expect, and they can be downright scandalous.

But you see it's the imperfect people who reflect the magnitude and beauty of God's redeeming love in the most powerful of ways.

So I invite you to join me as we enter once again into God's Word to us. This morning I invite you to open your bibles to Joshua chapter 2 verses 1-11. When I'm done reading I'll say this is the word of the Lord, so that if you believe it you can respond by saying "Thanks be to God." Listen carefully we're reading God's Holy Word.

Joshua 2:1-11

1 And Joshua the son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." And they went, and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there. So the Israelite spies are sent over into Canaan to scope out Jericho and they decide to stay in the home of a Prostitute, not for the normal reasons one might stay there, but for the reason that there they might find the greatest cover and secrecy, off the grid as it were. When Harriet Tubman was transporting slaves through the underground railroad she would often stay in the homes of nefarious businessmen, so as to go unnoticed. Now the name Rahab in Hebrew means loose or cheap or easy, not only that but in Hebrew mythology there is a story that before the creation of the world Yahweh battled a great Leviathan named Rahab, and so her nickname was also "monster." **2 And it was told the king of Jericho, "Behold, certain men of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land." 3 Then the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, "Bring forth the men that have come to you, who entered your house; for they have come to search out all the land." 4 But the woman** (notice that here she is called woman, not loose, not prostitute, not monster, she's called woman. You see God is

already redeeming her.) **the woman had taken the two men and hidden them; and she said, "True, men came to me, but I did not know where they came from; 5 and when the gate was to be closed, at dark, the men went out; where the men went I do not know; pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them." 6 But she had brought them up to the roof, and hid them with the stalks of flax which she had laid in order on the roof. 7 So the men pursued after them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords; and as soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut. 8 Before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, and said to the men, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, (I believe Rahab is making a profession of faith here, notice she doesn't say Ba'al is giving this to you, or Asherah, but Yahweh.) and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. 11 And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no courage left in any man, because of you; for the LORD your God is he who is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.**

This is the Word of the Lord... Thanks be to God! The grass withers and the flower falls but the word of the Lord lasts forever.

The story of Rahab of course doesn't end with her helping the Israelites cross over safely. The bible goes on to tell us that Rahab married an Israelite named Salmon and together they had a son named Boaz, who married a Moabite woman—another foreigner—named Ruth. And Ruth and Boaz would have a son named Obed. And Obed would have a son named Jesse, and Jesse as you remember was the father of a little shepherd boy named David who would become the king over all Israel, who's great, great, great times 14 grandson was a man named Joseph, who was the earthly father of Jesus.

And because God used Rahab this unexpected vessel, she has become apart of our family too! The book of Hebrews lifts her up among Isaac and Jacob as one of our champions of faith, there among them is Rahab. Hebrews 11, **By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace.** Rahab isn't just a part of Israel's crossing story, she's a part of God's crossing too.

No perfect people allowed.

Now of course God does not condone sin, we're not minimizing what it has done to our families and communities. This passage does not make light, or dismiss Rahab's past. But in the light of what God is doing, what God has in store, her past pales in comparison to the brilliance of Rahab's future. Regardless of where you are this morning, whatever path you are on, God's salvation his grace and loving kindness in Jesus Christ is a paradigm altering shift for you. When God saves, it's once and for all. The story of Rahab reveals the beauty and the joy that God takes when a life that is stuck, a life that is held captive by is used for the good purposes of God. Remember there are no perfect people, because it's the imperfect people who reflect God's plan most brilliantly.

If you were to ask just about any person walking down the street to name one Christian hymn, the vast majority would probably say Amazing Grace.

But the story of this beloved and timeless hymn that has been covered by everyone from Johnny Cash to Jessie Norman; Glen Campbell to Judy Collins is a story of the hope that God doesn't give up on us because of the sum of our past deeds.

John Newton was born in London July 24, 1725, the son of a commander of a merchant ship which sailed the Mediterranean. When John was eleven, he went to sea with his father and made six voyages with him. In 1744 John was impressed into service on a man-of-war, the H. M. S. Harwich. Finding conditions on board intolerable, he deserted but was soon recaptured and publicly flogged and demoted from midshipman to common seaman.

Finally at his own request he was exchanged into service on a slave ship, which took him to the coast of Sierra Leone. He then became the servant of a slave trader and was brutally abused. Early in 1748 he was rescued by a sea captain who had known John's father. John Newton ultimately became captain of his own ship, which ma.

As a young boy John had been taught the faith by his mother, who died tragically when he was very young. Along his many and expansive journeys he had long since given up an religious convictions. However, on a voyage home, while he was attempting to steer the ship through a violent storm, he experienced what he was to refer to later as his "great deliverance." He recorded in his journal: when all seemed lost and the ship would surely sink, he cried out, "Lord, have mercy upon us." Later in his cabin he reflected on what he had said and began to believe that God had addressed him through the storm and that grace had begun to work for him.

For the rest of his life he observed the anniversary of May 10, 1748 as the day of his conversion, a day of humiliation in which he subjected his will to a higher power. Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come; 'tis grace has bro't me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home." He continued in the slave trade for a time after his conversion, treating those under his care humanely; but ultimately gave up his post because his conscience would no longer allow him to traffic in human life.

In 1750 he married Mary Catlett, with whom he had been in love for many years. During his days as a sailor he had begun to educate himself, teaching himself Latin, among other subjects. And after learning under the great English Evangelists like George Whitefield Newton transitioned into the pastorate in the 1760s. It was during this time, in his congregation in Olney that he composed a song that would be given the title Amazing Grace. The origin of the melody is unknown. Most hymnals attribute it to an early American folk melody. But one researcher speculated that it may have originated as the tune of a song the slaves sang on one of his ships.

No perfect people, just perfectly useable imperfect people.

Before coming to Wabash I was the pastor of a little country church in Illinois, also named Wabash—how do you like that? Well one day while I was leading a bible study with a group of elders from the church there was a knock on the door. One of my elders answered the

door and brought a message to me that this woman, whose name was Megan was asking about getting married to her fiancé Brad, and they wanted me to counsel them.

Well later that week I met with Megan and Brad and what unfolded was a story that totally knocked me off my feet. You see Megan was a young mother with two children who was just coming out of rehab for a serious Meth addiction. And it was before her time in rehab that she met Brad a single man of about 50 who had been abandoned by his wife, and forced to raise his children alone.

Megan and Brad had been going to church off and on, they were new to it, but something in them said they needed to be there. Unfortunately the churches they visited had a clean up policy. YOU CLEAN UP AND GET RID OF YOUR SIN, then you're welcome here with us. I tell you it broke my heart. But as I sat there with them and we talked about how God's love for them in Jesus was strong enough to transform the life of an addict and a man with abandonment issues. I heard the story of two imperfect people rescuing one another. Brad, who had never trusted women since his wife left him, would travel 3 hours each way, once a week to visit Megan for her one afternoon of visitation. And it was there that their relationship took root. And upon her departure from rehab Brad worked tirelessly with Megan to regain the custody of her two children, even though he had already been a dad once before. Brad and Megan came to know the forgiving and redeeming love of Jesus through one another and a community who rallied around them.

So that after they said I do, they were greeted at their reception by our entire congregation. That following week Brad, a man who'd never been baptized asked if we would baptize him. There are no perfect people in God's kingdom, there are only usable people. People who've been used up, knocked around, and pushed down, who hear that there's a God out there who can save people just like them. People with a past, people with skeletons in their closet, people with a dark side, these are the people God often uses in the mightiest of ways. And God doesn't simply make space for them at the kids table, God weaves them into the very redemption story of the world. Rahab is a part of the genealogy of Jesus.

What the inclusion of Rahab in the genealogy of Jesus tells us is that God is more than capable, and in fact might even prefer to use less than perfect people to do extraordinary things. Rahab the prostitute, Moses the murderer, David the adulterer, Saul the persecutor. And maybe, just maybe, God intends to use them as a reminder of his eagerness to redeem our faults and use them for his purposes.

With this I want us to think about a couple of things. First is that sometimes God turns weeds into wheat.

There was this couple who argued their whole marriage, 60 years, they didn't have a happy marriage. They went over to Jerusalem, and as fate would have it, the husband died while they were there visiting Jerusalem. So the wife was ticked, because she had to make all these decisions and arrangements while there in Jerusalem. So one day she's meeting with the undertaker and he says, you can either have the body shipped back to the states and it will cost you 5,000 or you can have it buried here in Jerusalem and that will only cost you 150. The woman thought for a minute and then said, I think I'll spend the 5,000 for him to be shipped back to America. "Really?" the man said. She said Yes, a long time ago there once

was a man in Jerusalem who died and came back to life again after three days and I just can't take that chance.

Sometimes we don't want the things of God to be reversed, but God does them anyways. There is a parable that Jesus told about a farmer who planted wheat field, then in the night another man came and sowed weeds in that field and the weed began to grow up. Later the servant asked the master should I go and pull all the weeds? And the master said no, when we harvest the wheat we will separate the weeds and burn them and keep the wheat. What you can almost hear Jesus saying is, sometimes weeds can become wheat.

Rahab may not have had much of a choice—so many in her place do not. But the beauty of this story is that because of her faith and willingness to be used Rahab is now a part of God's story and God's family.

And the second point is that we should never forget that we were once weeds too. And some of us are still a little weedy.

Third, the more we realize that we are just a group of imperfect people, journeying together with other imperfect people the sooner we will be open to the growth God has in store for us. The single most important thing we can say to one another over and over and over again is "NO PERFECT PEOPLE." There are no perfect people, there are only loved, redeemed, grace given people—and that gift is free to all.

Last, always remember that God is the one who transforms lives. We enter this place as imperfect people, and it is God who by the power and mercy of God's grace in Christ who perfects us, it's Christ who makes us whole again.

Remember there are no perfect people, but there are perfectly usable people, that can be you, it can be me. But watch out, because like Rahab, God may do something of incomparable significance, God may weave you into the very salvation story of someone else. It may only take a kind word or a generous gesture to change the life of another, and set them on course for life with God. Amen