

6.9.2024 Sermon

Hebrews 11:31 | Is This Seat Taken?

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Elder Kevin Brisbin

Well, happy June everyone. I wanted to start with a little activity this morning. If you want to participate, just yell out your response, and if you love activities like this, just keep sewing. What does June represent for you? End of school. Yes, that's its true end of school, and for parents, the last vestige of bedtime.

I mean, it is so bright, so late. How many of you have heard, "How can it be bedtime? It's still light out?" Yes, like it was. There's no hope. It's just over.

Call it sunset tonight is at 8:31, and it's late for another 90 minutes after that. What else do you think of with June? Pride Month? Yes, absolutely. We just celebrated together as a community yesterday.

And I have to say, just a plug, the Alliance and the vendors do such an amazing event for our local Chester County pride that takes place in Phoenixville. Phoenixville has such a culture that's just really beautiful. And it invites it into that. And the Alliance comes alongside that. And the vendors come alongside that.

And it's a really beautiful thing. And I heard that the first year that we were there was three years ago. In that year, there were three churches present. And every year there are more and more churches present. And I just want to say like, amen, like as it should be.

And I'm so grateful for that, and I hope that we can both, you know, all sides hold space for one another, that we can hold space for all of the people that exist in that identity. And that those people can start to hold space for like maybe this could be something that I could come

back to you or like coming to for the first time. Maybe this doesn't have to be something that's you know at odds with who I am or doesn't reject me and the base identity of who I am.

So yes, a beautiful, beautiful event. If you've not gone, it is a really lovely pride. Our whole family goes; it's very family-friendly. All Inclusive means all inclusive. It is a beautiful day.

Anything else in June? Summer, yes, longer warmer days. Yes. Our serotonin-seeking brains are very happy right now. That too, there is some sweat. Yeah, that's how you interpret it.

Yes, that can be a good thing. Anything else for Hallmark? What is it, grads and dads? It's grads and dads season? I see that above all those greeting cards, grandson dance, and yes, it is granddad's season.

Anything else? Juneteenth. Yes. Juneteenth on June 19. Fireflies? What was that?

Honeysuckles. Poison Ivy? Yes. All of that. Mosquitoes. Yes, June holds a lot.

S'mores. Yes. I also think historically, maybe more so than right now, June used to be like wedding season, I think of weddings with June. Partly because my wedding is in June. So that could be why.

Thanks. And just a little plug since I do have the microphone and I do. This June, we are celebrating our 20th wedding anniversary. Look at us. And I know you're thinking he looks far too young to have been married 20 years, and you're right.

But we were married as children. So not far from the truth. But yes, June is a month that has holds a great deal of things. What a month. It's a good thing that it comes with those extra-long days, the longest day of the year, because it gives us all that much more daylight in which to celebrate them.

Well, today is also kind of a big deal here in Hebrews 11. We've reached the final by faith statement. Thanks, Anna. Let's see if my clicker works. Hey, we've reached the final by faith statement.

But don't get it twisted because it's almost like the writer of Hebrews was in a June Season of Life himself, like the end of the school year. Like you know, at the beginning of the school year, you start out strong or at the beginning of a paper you start out real strong. And you're like by faith this and by faith this person did this and by faith this person did that.

And then he gets to he or she gets we don't know that we're the author of Hebrews. The author gets to this point in Hebrews They kind of look back and they're like, Wait, this is all the farther we are. And they it's almost like you can see the panic wash over their face between my verse 31 And Matt's verse, verse 32, next week, because verse 32 starts with, and what more shall I say, I don't even have time to tell you about and just like list the string of names with no stories whatsoever.

And that is the voice of June. Phone into the like, okay, yeah. And then we have these people, they do lots of things, too. There's I don't want to I even have time to say, but today is the final by faith statement.

So, who do we think holds this esteemed honor? Well, last week, we marched with Joshua around Jericho as we heard from Reverend Sondra, but we didn't actually name Joshua. So perhaps it will be him. He is the successor to Moses after all, which is you know, kind of a big deal. And Moses was the last one to be named.

So, all of which makes Joshua a likely and worthy candidate. Or perhaps it will be David. You know, king, King David. There's a very strong through line thus far in these by faith statements moving through generations and genealogies. And we know the New Testament writers can't resist a good Genealogical through line, with King David often being one of the main tent poles of their demarcation.

Plus, by faith, David met Goliath on the battlefield and defeated him with a stone in the sling has a nice ring to it, making him a very strong contender. But none of those seemingly obvious front runners won the honor, and this just goes to show us You never know who God will use. And with that, the envelope please.

The final by faith statement wasn't a king. Yes, stick figures they're back. I'm sorry, I'm supposed to read it first to tell you who it is by faith. Rahab the sex worker did not perish with those who were unbelieving after she welcomed the spies in peace.

The final person recognized with a dedicated set apart individualized by faith statement wasn't a king. They weren't a prophet. They were not a military leader or a leader at all. They were not a patriarch. No, she wasn't a man at all. She was a sex worker.

And she wasn't an Israelite. She hadn't been delivered out of Egypt and walked through the sea on dry land. No, she was not part of the author's cultural in crowd. In fact, she was part of the opposition. The squatters as Reverend Sondra said last week, part of the Canaanites occupying the land that was promised to the Israelites.

Furthermore, she wasn't part of the inner circle of Jericho either. Neither figuratively or literally. So, who was she? Well, we meet her here in Hebrews, which is confusingly a little bit written in Greek. So that means it's time for Greek grammar school a crash course for Christians. Your favorite segment and mine?

Rahab's life is recorded in Joshua, chapters two and six. And she's remembered in Matthew one, Hebrews 11 and James two. So, let's start with her history. So, Joshua, chapter two, verse one, and we're going to move all the way through chapter two, if you'd like to follow along.

Then Joshua, son of Nun secretly sent out to spies from Shem. Go look over the land, he said, especially Jericho. So, they went and entered the house of a sex worker named Rahab and stayed there. Wait a minute, is that what Josh would just said? Joshua was secretly sent to spies and ask them to go look over the land.

Okay, got it. Got it. So, we went into the house of a sex worker named rehab and stayed there. Nope, that was not what he said at all. But here we are, and you gotta love the Bible. And we do we really do.

This is not a great look for these two spies and also not a glowing introduction to Rahab either. And there are those who wish to clean up this introduction positing that maybe Rahab was more of an innkeeper. But rehabs name and bow both the Greek and the Hebrew, which is the language now that we're in the Old Testament, and the uarctic, which was her local regional dialect.

All of those her name means wide and open, explicitly sexual in nature by her very name in the Hebrew, Zanna. Zina is a verb. And so, it's a different tense. So, like we translated as harlot, but it's actually a verb and this is directly from the lexicon.

This is a verb that means, and I quote, go a whoring. That is the translation of the word in the fictional lexicon, feel free to look it up yourself, I couldn't make this stuff up. go a whoring. And equally explicit, were the two phrases the author of Joshua used here for the spies who came into her house and laid there for the night.

That last one being shaqab, which means to lie is in to lie of sexual relations, like he laid with his wife, and then they had a child. If anything, it seems the author is leaning into her occupation, rather than shying away from it or being ashamed of it.

Verse two, and here I'm going to stop with all of the slides this way with the text and I just want you to kind of listen and take it in as we go. So, verse two, if you'd like to follow on, you're

welcome to follow along in this in the Bible, Joshua, verse two, the king of Jericho was told look, some Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land.

They had one job. So, the king of Jericho sent this message to rehab bring out the man who came to you and entered your house because they have come to spy on the whole land. Some spies they have just arrived. And already they've been discovered their plan has been discovered, and their exact location has been discovered and made known to the king of Jericho on the first night.

Verse four, but the woman had taken two men and hidden them, she said, Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they'd come from. At dusk, when it's time to close the city gate, they left I don't know which way they went, go after them quickly, you may catch them. But she had taken them up on the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flack she had laid out on her roof.

So, the men sit down in pursuit of the spies on the road that leads to the Fords of the Jordan. And as soon as the pursue is had gone out, the gate was shut our heroine of the faith, lying to her king and committing treason to her country, all to hide these two Israelite spies, she has only come to know this very day.

Why? And important question. Why? Well, it's one whose answer may become more evident as we continue. So just put a little pin in that as we keep reading here, in verse eight, before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof and said to them, I know what the Lord has given you this land, and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you.

We've heard how the Lord dried up the waters of the Red Sea for you when you came to Egypt, came out of Egypt, and what you did for Sahana and Og, the two kings of the Amorites, the east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. That passage which is awfully specific and awfully flattering language to attribute to Rahab, as if she would know all of these very specific things they had done.

But she is likely adept at the art of persuasion, so we'll give it to her. And the author continues in verse 11, with when we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God in heaven above and on the earth below. And this is our first clue.

Fear it's clear at least from the recorded perspectives of the Israelites and History is written by the victors that the residents of Jericho are scared from King to commoner. Twice rehab is

recording, recorded as saying that they were melting in fear. And I'm sure we all know what a powerful motivator fear can be, right?

I mean, fear is physical, cortisol and adrenaline released your blood pressure and your heart rates can increase, you start breathing faster, even your blood flow changes flowing away from your heart and to your limbs making it easier to like throw punches or run for your life. So, is this faith? Or is it fear?

Or can it be both? And can it be more? Can her faith take her fear and actually channel it into something else? Hope perhaps, could she capitalize on this moment of National Fear and in faith see a path out of her personal fear? Could she be feeling all of these things? We are complex beings after all.

Well, let's see. Verse 12. Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my mom My brothers and my sisters, and all who belong to them, and that you will save us from death our lives for your lives, the men assured her.

If you don't tell where we are what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the Lord has given us the land. So, she let them down by a rope through her window for the house she lived in was part of a city wall. She said to them go to the hills, so your pursuers will not find you Hide yourselves there three days until they return, and then go on your way.

And there is our second clue for the house she lived in was part of the city wall. She lived out her life in the outer wall of the city, cemented into the actual outskirts of town. She was an outsider. She wasn't an outlaw, but she was an outcast. So, what did she have to lose?

And here I believe we're observing the actions of a survivor of someone who's not lived under the stability of security as someone who perceives a threat to herself and to her family and has been conditioned by their life and their life experiences to recognize and seize an opportunity for rescue when they see one presented, because the wall wasn't there to protect her. For Rahab. The great walls of Jericho weren't a place of safety and stability. They were a place of immobility. She is doubly out. She's out from the Israelites, and she's out from Jericho.

She lives her daily life under threat. And then here comes another threat from the outside, perhaps an even greater threat to her existing thread. And so, she senses and sees as an opportunity that quite literally knocked on her door. These two spies show up at her house. They're wearing sunglasses because they're spies.

And they're, they're really good spies, y'all. And whether by faith or hope or cunning or grit or desperation or some of all of that emotional buffet, she hides them up on the roof, and then brokers a deal or to use their language proposes a covenant. And this is a language in which the Israelite spies are fluent. Verse 17. Now the men said to her, this oath you made a swear will not be binding on us unless when we enter the land, you have tied the scarlet cord in the window through which you led us down and unless you have brought your father and mother, your brothers and all your family into your house.

If any of them go outside of your house into the street, their blood will be on your own heads. We will not be responsible. As for those who are in the house with you their blood will be on our hands if a hand is laid on them. But if you tell us we are doing we will be released from this oath You made us swear. Sound familiar?

Yeah, it's a little contractual. But it's also absolutely the Passover. It's like the Passover that was written all over this. Only she marks her window with a scarlet cord rather than her door with the scarlet blood of the Lamb. But both of those are in order for her family to be spared from a great trouble.

So, in verse 21, agreed, she replied, let it be, as you said. So, she sent them away and they departed. There's a little rope there in a window a little hard to see but they're now on the outside. And you better believe she tied that scarlet cord in her window. Because that scarlet cord was her lifeline.

Her own rope to escape the walls where she had been firmly fixed in place grouted into the outer wall of life mortared into the margin, and these Israelite spies were at her window. And these spies were her window, a vantage point to a vista beyond life in the wall. They were a possible point of egress through which she could escape the wall and the system that had held her and her family firmly on the outside. Maybe, just maybe, if the Israelites took their place, she could take hers. Verse 22, when they left, they went into the hills and stayed there for three days.

Nailed it until the pursuers had searched all along the road and return without finding them. Then the two of the men started back, they went down out of the hills forded the river and came to Joshua son of Nun and told him everything that had happened to them. They said to Joshua the Lord has surely given us the whole land. It's all in our hands. All the people are melting in fear because of us.

Now, if we were going to grade this spying expedition, do have some critiques. They were charged with going secretly looking over the whole land partial credit they did say specifically Jericho, so partial credit will be given here even though they literally didn't make it past the

outer wall and went straight to a sex worker's house and taboo, they only escaped with their lives because of the benevolent behavior and brokerage of said sex worker living on the margins of her society, she received them. She fed that Intel to her king and fed the entirety of what little good intel they bring back to Joshua here provided the plans and the means for their escape, and advise them on where and how long to hide in order to skirt the local search mission. Beyond that, they provide no Intel whatsoever on possible access points or areas of vulnerability that can be used to try to address an attack, you know, like a spy. But I digress.

Thank God for rehab or they may have wandered the wilderness for another 40 years. Fast forward to all that we read and studied last week with Reverend Sondra Joshua received the orders and carried them out. They circled the city for seven days and on the seventh day, we pick it up here in Joshua chapter six and in verse 15. So, Joshua, chapter six, verse 15. On the seventh day, they got up at daybreak and marched around the city seven times in the same manner, except on that day, they circled the city seven times, the seventh time around when the priest sounded the trumpets Joshua command of the army, shout, for the Lord has given you the city, the city and all that is in order to be devoted to the Lord only Rahab the sex worker and all who are with her in her house shall be spared because she had hid the spies we sent, that keep away from the devoted things so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them.

Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. All the silver and gold and all the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the Lord and must go into his treasury. And this part has nothing to do with rehab. But the scene is giving me major Aladdin vibes where it's like touch nothing but the lamp. But again, I digress.

Verse 20, when the trumpet sounded the army shouted, all of that, that they miraculously remember very long speech, said and shout, this wasn't like a short little like, war cry. When the trumpet sounded the army shout, and maybe they were just like, and at the end, at the sound of the trumpet, when the men gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed. So, everyone charged straight in and they took the city. They devoted the city to the Lord and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it men, women and children, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys. Verse 22, Joshua said to the two men who spied the land, go into the sex worker's house and bring her out and all who belonged to her in accordance with your oath to her.

So, the young man who had done the spying, air quotes, went in and brought out Rahab, her father, her mother, her brothers and sisters, and all belong to her, they brought the entire family out and put them in a place outside the camp of Israel. Out of the path of destruction, but yet again, on the outside, only this time on the outside of the Israelite camp, first 24, then they burned the whole city and everything in it. But they put the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron into the treasury of the Lord's house. But Joshua spared Rahab, the sex

worker with her family and all who belonged to her because she hid them in Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho. And she lives among the Israelites to this day.

Did you see it? A pivot. She lives among the Israelites to this day. She doesn't live alongside them; she lives among them, no longer on the outside, but as an integrated part. And this is key.

This is a textbook example of bounded sets versus considered sets. In Canaan, Rahab was bound in the outer wall of the city. This bounded set had literal bounds in walls; they were high, they were thick, so thick that she lived in them. They absorbed the outer circle of society. And that is where those people lived.

Sure, the king or at least the king's men could come to her, but she couldn't move toward them. In her day-to-day life, men came to her, but she could not move toward them. She was Rahab, the sex worker, not Rahab, the wife. Her movement was restricted. She was out, and she couldn't get in, even if she wanted to.

Movement was a privilege of the powerful. But then she saw another way, a way out to a God who made ways where there were no ways to a God famous for his deliverance, out of bondage, through seas, and into promised lands. Could it be? Could God do that for her? Could she really move?

Could she move toward God? And so, she takes a step and welcomes the spies. She takes another step and hides them, and then delivers them out her window. She takes another step and ties that scarlet cord in the very same window, wondering if it will lead to her own deliverance, deliverance to a place where she can take all the steps she wants.

And that's what she did. She said, "These boots are made for walking." And that's just what they'll do. And she walked right out of that bound and said at Jericho, it's bounded wall and rubble, and she entered the camp of Israel. Yes, she started out on the outside of the camp. But y'all, this is the difference.

She moved. She was given the freedom to move and to take steps. And she lives among the Israelites to this day. And while that is already more of an epilogue than we typically get in a story like this, and a book that never ceases to surprise us, we get a glimpse at a bit more with Rahab thanks to those fascinating genealogical through lines, those New Testament writers love so much.

In Matthew chapter one, verse five, we get this part: Solomon 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. Rahab woke up like any other day, trapped, stuck. Nothing extraordinary. But then two Israelite spies show up, and she makes a decision to receive them and to hide them.

And that decision leads to the fall of Jericho, the entrance of the Israelites into the promised land of Moses, Jacob, and Abraham; it leads to marriage. Marriage with Salmon, it leads to the birth of a son, Boaz, which leads to Rahab, becoming the other mother-in-law to Ruth. And it leads to Rahab, which the Bible repeatedly refers to as the sex worker, being the great-great-grandmother of David.

Yes, that David, the Giant Slayer, the king, and the adulterer and the murderer, and the repentant and the forgiven. See, while they repeatedly refer to Rahab as Rahab, the sex worker, no one is one thing. Identity is complexity. And just a reminder, we get all of these complex characters from Jesus the Messiah's family tree.

So, if you ever think, "Can God work through me?" I assure you, Yes, God can. And yes, God is. And when we think that the work is small or insignificant, not particularly full of faith, remember Rahab, the sex worker, welcoming spies in peace, made it into the Bible as the final by faith statement, worthy of its own place of recognition in the hall of faith.

And to double down on that, James includes her as one of only two examples he gives in his chapter on faith, on the chapter of how faith without works is dead. He lists only two examples: Abraham, the patriarch of patriarchs, and Rahab, the sex worker, in James chapter two, verse 25, in the same way, was not even Rahab, the sex worker 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.

And yes, James also refers to her as Rahab, the sex worker; they really don't let that go. Even though she clearly had a life beyond that. A life with Salmon and Boaz as a life living among the Israelites to this day. And I love that she's woven into that family tapestry, not a fringe, but a scarlet cord that runs right through the center of it.

Right through David, straight on to Jesus, according to Matthew. And that's the beautiful for encouraging and challenging thing, we don't decide who gets a seat at the table. We don't decide who gets a seat at the table. That's a beautiful thing when we're invited to the table, even when we may feel unworthy or undeserving ourselves.

But it's also a challenging thing. Once we are at the table, and we see who else has a seat. Really, them God. Yes, them. Perhaps the 23rd Psalm says, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." This isn't a gloating posture.

See, when I was younger, that's how I read this. And to be honest, when I lived with a bounded set theology, that's just how I interpreted it like I'm on the inside, looking out, almost like this is a like in your face to my enemies. But love changes us, doesn't it? Love invites us into a different space, a boundless space with the love of Jesus at the center.

And so, I don't read it that way anymore. Now, I believe that in the presence of my enemies means in the presence of my enemies, as in they are present too they too have a seat. In fact, the balance of this verse may allude to that very context. These are like little couplets in the poem poetry that is the 23rd Psalm and this couplet together, as you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies, you anoint my head with oil, my cup runs over.

And I'm aware of three reasons that shepherds like the one on the 23rd Psalm anoint the head of sheep, and all three have to do with conflict, whether avoiding, minimizing, or healing after conflict, you know, like with an enemy, and My cup runs over is a clear illustration of, there's enough, there's enough for you, and there's enough for them. No matter who you are, no matter what you've done, no matter where you come from, no matter where you live, you have a seat at the table, you have a seat at God's table, and you have a seat at our table, all of you, and all of you, and so does your enemy.

And sometimes I think we're our own enemies, inviting parts of ourselves to the table when all of us is invited to the table. Because when we bring even the parts of ourselves that we don't like or aren't proud of, only then are those parts exposed to the love, generosity, and kindness of God. And that is what leads to repentance. Wherever repentance is needed.

The loving kindness of God will lead us there. I trust that, because I trust God. But when the enemy is someone other than yourself, even there, remember, where you start doesn't determine where you finish. Rahab started as an enemy, turned out to be an ally. Hold space for surprises like that.

Because God is a wonder, wonder. And love is more powerful than any of us know. And God isn't done with any of us yet. So, let's keep those chairs and our hearts and our minds open. Because you never know what seemingly small decision may lead to walls coming down, realized promises, and legacies of reconciliation and reintegration.

And that's what the table is all about. Amen.