

The 100th Day of School. Trinity Lutheran School. Bay City, MI. The day a superhero appeared. His name, Zero the Hero. He wore red tights. Had a cape and goggles. He had zeros all over his shirt and cape. He entered each classroom to music. He emphasized the word zero. He said, "At Cape Canaveral, what is the most famous number. Then he went, 10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3, 2,1. ZERO. He pointed out that he liked to eat cherrios, since they looked like Zeros. He said his mother always made him feel good, because she said he would always be a zero. The children at Trinity Lutheran School loved Zero. He was their hero. Who was this masked man? This zero? Today, I would like to confess to you that I am zero, Zero the hero. And so are you. We are all zeros because of our sins in the sight of God, but because of Jesus we are now heroes. Let's look at the theme today: "God Makes Zeroes into Heroes!"

Our zero under consideration today is a woman named Rahab. By trade, she was a prostitute. You wouldn't ever want to brag that you were related to this woman.

Rahab was a Canaanite who lived in the city of Jericho at the time Joshua was preparing to march the Israelites into the Promised Land. Indeed, their first target was the city where Rahab lived. Before Joshua made any move against Jericho, however, he sent two spies to see what they could learn about the city. The spies used Rahab's house as their hub for exploration. Since Rahab was a prostitute, the spies figured that no one would pay any attention when they, two strangers, stayed at her place.

However, someone realized that the two men staying at Rahab's weren't regular paying customers of hers but were Israelite spies. The king of Jericho sent soldiers to arrest the men but when they came, Rahab told them that the spies had already escaped. The soldiers took off after the spies in the direction Rahab pointed while all along the spies were hiding on the roof of Rahab's house. When the soldiers had gone, Rahab helped the spies escape through her window, which was built into the wall of the city.

Why did Rahab hide enemy spies? The New Testament books of the Bible, Hebrews and James, tell us that she did so because she had faith in the true God. But I thought Rahab was a prostitute? She had been. But by the time the spies arrived at her place she had become a believer. How did she become a believer? Rahab, along with all the people of Jericho, heard about the miracles God had worked for the Israelites in bringing them out of Egypt. They knew how God had parted the Red Sea for them and then closed the waters on the pursuing Egyptians. If that's what God had done to the super-power Egypt, what chance did a city like theirs have against the Israelites and their God?

We shouldn't think that Rahab was just hedging her bets, however. She wasn't just siding with the Israelite spies because she wanted to back a winner. She had genuine faith. Rahab must have also heard about the promise that all nations would be blessed through the Israelites. This promise pointed ahead to the birth of Jesus who would come from the Israelite nation but be born to save all people from their sin. Rahab believed this promise and trusted that through the Israelites God would send someone to save her from her sins.

The way Rahab came to faith is a reminder that no witness about Jesus is a wasted witness. Rahab didn't come to believe in Jesus because Joshua had come to town with a thousand Israelite priests to hold a spiritual rally for the inhabitants of Jericho. It seems that she learned about the true God through messengers who were themselves unbelievers. Maybe it was a neighbor or even a customer who told Rahab about what

God had done for the Israelites. At any rate, God worked through that message to create faith in her heart. Isn't it encouraging to know that God can create faith in such a way? That should take away some of the excuses we give for not witnessing more often. God can create faith through that sermon you've forwarded to a friend, or that devotion. He can create faith when you tell a friend, "we all haven't lived up to God's expectations of being perfect. We all have sinned. But God sent Jesus to be our substitute, our Savior and die for us. For the Bible tells us, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." Don't think that "little" witnessing opportunities are not worth the effort. Nor should we think that there are certain kinds of people we shouldn't bother witnessing to because we don't think they will ever believe. Every sinner who hears God's Word, no matter what his sin or her past, is a good candidate to become a believer, for the Holy Spirit can bring anyone to faith – even a prostitute like Rahab, and even a sinner like me!

The other important spiritual lesson this story teaches us is that faith does not sit on the heart like a trophy sits on a mantle gathering dust. Faith is active. Rahab's faith moved her to put her life on the line to save the two Israelite spies. Admittedly our expressions of faith might not be as dramatic as Rahab's but when Christians volunteer to serve around church, or in the community, and do this because they are grateful for Jesus' love, what we do is as pleasing to God as what Rahab did.

The sad truth is we don't always live our faith, do we? By nature we are more interested in serving ourselves than others. For example we find it easier to complain about what we're having for supper rather than volunteer to make the meal so the regular cook can have a break. When we fail to show love for each other even to those we don't like, we sin. Since we sin daily like this we can only be sure of God's salvation by trusting his promise of salvation. That's what Rahab did. You see, before the spies left, she exacted a promise from them that she and her family would not be harmed when the Israelites returned to attack the city. The spies gave their word but instructed Rahab to hang out the window a scarlet rope. They promised that as long as the scarlet rope hung from the window and everyone was gathered in that house, no one would be harmed.

When you think of it, a single scarlet rope doesn't seem to offer lot of protection from an invading army. It's seems an especially flimsy defense when you consider how God brought about the destruction of Jericho - by causing its walls to crumble. When the priests began to blow their ram's horns and when the Israelites soldiers started to shout, I wonder if Rahab wasn't tempted to seek shelter in a friend's house that wasn't so close to the wall? I wonder if she didn't think that the spies had lied to her and that there was no way she and her family were going to be spared? Although she may have been tempted to run out of that house, she stayed where she was, trusting that the scarlet rope marked her and her family for salvation. God didn't disappoint Rahab's faith. Although the city walls toppled all around them God kept Rahab and her family safe.

Although the Bible doesn't make this comparison I can't help but think of the scarlet blood of Christ when I think of that scarlet rope Rahab was to hang out the window. Just as the scarlet rope didn't seem like it would offer much protection from an invading army, hearing that the blood of Christ keeps us safe from God's wrath might sound a little foolish. Yet this is God's promise. If we want to find refuge from God's anger against our sins and lack of faithfulness, we will only find it in the scarlet blood of Christ. Take refuge in his blood and trust that even when the world is falling down

around your ears, eternal destruction will not touch you because Jesus' blood washes away our sin and keeps us safe from God's wrath.

From zero to hero. That's what God made Rahab. Who would have thought God would use a prostitute to help his people in their fight against Jericho? And who would have thought that this cracked ornament would find a prominent place on Jesus' family tree? You see after the destruction of Jericho, Rahab reformed her ways. She settled down and married an Israelite and had a baby boy named Boaz. You know Boaz. He was the man who married Ruth. Ruth and Boaz were the great grandparents of King David.

Although we too are cracked ornaments and don't deserve a place on Jesus' family tree, God hangs us there. He puts us there because we have faith that our sins were washed away by Jesus and have been adopted into his family.

But don't think that God just wants us hanging around. He took us who were zeroes and made us into heroes. In other words he saved us for service. So like Rahab look for opportunities to help others even if it means putting your life on the line, or even if it simply means taking an extra thirty minutes out of your day. Serve and witness because this is what God saved you to do. Don't be down on yourself today. God has made you and me, ZEROS into Heroes! Amen.