

## Season after Pentecost

Summer Sermon Series: "THAT'S in the Bible"

August 9 & 10, 2014

Haven Lutheran Church Hagerstown MD

Readings: Psalm 67, Joshua 2; 6: 22-25; Matthew 1: 1-6

*Grace and peace to you from God - Father, Son, Holy Spirit –Amen*

Comedians and television shows strive to create their own personal brand – something distinctive that will stick in your mind. It's considered a great show business success when the public hears a particular quote and automatically connects it with a particular comic, character or TV. program. See if you can guess the person or show:

"Is that your final answer" (Who Wants to be a Millionaire)

"The devil made me do" (Flip Wilson)

"Mom always liked you best." (Smothers Brothers)

(Sing) " I'm so glad we had this time together..." (Carol Burnett)

"Just can't get no respect" (Rodney Dangerfield)

"Hey, hey, hey.... Fat Albert" (Bill Cosby)

"The tribe has spoken" (Survivor)

"It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood." (Mr. Rodgers)

"Moi?" (Miss Piggy)

"Just a wild and crazy guy" (Steve Martin)

"Elementary, my dear Watson." (Sherlock Holmes)

You may have other classic connections in your family history. My Dad was a character. When touring with my sister's family, it was SO my Dad to eventually choose to sit on a bench and people watch while they kept going. In malls, parks, or on tours, we still point out what would have been "Grandpa's bench." My Dad was very vigilant about protecting his car from getting nicked in parking lots by someone carelessly getting out of their car. It was SO my Dad to either park far away from the store entrance OR, if he was lucky, he's find the end spot closest to the entrance in which he could position his car way over to one side, far, far away from the opening doors of the next car. To this day we'll call out, "There's a Dad space." My sister and I will e-mail each other jokes with terrible puns in them, saying "It's SO Dad" I could go on but I'm sure you have those signature quirks

and characteristics of your own family members or friends that make you say, “That is so Mom” “That is so George” “That is so you!”

As we read through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, there are certain themes, images, messages that keep repeating. One of the most persistent, distinctive and perhaps baffling characteristics of the Lord’s interaction with humankind is God’s “use of the weakest, the smallest, the most ill-equipped, the outcast, the downtrodden, the powerless, the reviled, the hopeless, to be the significant, divinely-empowered messengers of God’s word and instruments of God’s work.”<sup>1</sup> As preacher Leonard Sweet likes to say, “Whenever a blatantly unqualified, supremely clueless individual is introduced into a biblical story, you can bet that this is the person God will single out for special service.”<sup>2</sup> It’s just SO God!

- Create a new people, an entire nation in relationship with God? It’s SO God to choose a ninety-plus year old childless couple to start up the population boom.
- Free a huge number of slaves from the most powerful nation on earth? It’s SO God to pick a stuttering, stammering shepherd who had already made himself a special enemy of the pharaoh he was supposed to be addressing.
- Establish a unique royal household to change Israel’s history? It’s SO God to choose [David,] a skinny teen-aged dreamer/poet/musician who had never done more than move sheep around from field to field.
- Looking for a new, powerful, prophetic voice? It’s SO God to choose Jonah, the guy who only takes the job when it’s a choice between God’s plans and the inside of a fish’s belly.<sup>3</sup>
- Want to send a voice of sanity to the exiled Israel? It’s SO God to send depressed prophet Jeremiah to do outrageous things to enact God’s message.

- SO God for the Messiah to be born to Mary, a teenage unwed mother.
- It's SO God to choose Peter, a dense-as-granite fisherman with a bull-in-a-china-shop personality, who even betrayed his Lord, to be the rock of the church <sup>4</sup>

It's just SO God to surprise us again and again by accomplishing great things through the weak, least, lost or last. That is what we see again in the often overlooked story of Rahab the prostitute — one of four women Matthew chose to include in the family tree of Jesus.

The Israelites under the leadership of Moses' successor Joshua are about to begin their campaign to occupy the Promised Land. It will begin with the miraculous siege of Jericho, whose walls will come tumbling down at merely their loud shouts under God's direction. But first Joshua sends in spies to scout out Jericho. They end up in the home of Rahab the prostitute. Because it's the best place to collect gossip or conveniently located between the great walls? We're not told. What we do learn is that Rahab does know what's going on in the hearts and mind of the people in Jericho. They are scared of the Israelites because they are afraid of the power of their God who has done miraculous things. Rahab herself professes, "The LORD your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below." The spies and Rahab strike a deal. She will hide them from the king's men and help them escape to safety IF they will promise to spare her and her family when the Israelites conquer Jericho. After spelling out what would cancel the deal, the spies agree Rahab and her family will be spared. Rahab will hang a red cord from the window through which they will escape. Later, Joshua *will* honor that promise and spare Rahab and her family.

Rahab the prostitute is woven into God's plan to lead the Israelites into their homeland. And Rahab the prostitute is woven into the genealogical line that will lead to the Hebrew's great King David. It's just SO God. Not that God is condoning Rahab's profession any more than God condones any of our sin. Yet when God is at work for the

good of God's people, "it's never about what we ARE....it's always about God and what God can do with us and through us."<sup>5</sup> The gospel writer Matthew chooses to make that clear in his genealogy of Jesus. It's surprising to find women included in the first place. But Matthew includes Tamar, who tricks her father-in-law so she can get pregnant by him; Rahab, the prostitute, Ruth, the Moabite foreigner and Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, the victim of David's lust and successful plot to kill her husband Uriah. it's really rather scandalous. But Matthew doesn't cover up Jesus ancestry. Because Jesus, the perfect "SO God," is himself "the rejected one, the crucified one, the stumbling block, [who] became the "cornerstone" of faith and salvation for all humanity."<sup>6</sup> Jesus came to let us know God's saving grace is for women and men, Gentiles and Jews, sinners and struggling saints, those with sterling pedigree and those with dubious histories. None are beyond God's love. And, that IS SO God!

Keep your eyes open. The exact person you think the least likely to be God's instrument may be the person through whom God wants to bless you. That is SO God! And maybe just as shocking is that the person you see in the mirror each morning is one of the exact people through whom God wants to bless others and the world. Yep, it's SO God! Watch for Godprints in your day — gifts of grace, kindness, mercy and hope — especially in the least likely people and places. When you see them, don't forget to say, with a knowing smile, "That's SO God." Linda M Alessandri 8/8/14

#### ENDNOTES

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1. Leonard Sweet, "Is SO God!" Collected Sermons, ChristianGlobe Networks, 2007, 0-000-1415
  2. Leonard Sweet, "Is SO God!" Collected Sermons, ChristianGlobe Networks, 2007, 0-000-1415
  3. Leonard Sweet, "Is SO God!" Collected Sermons, ChristianGlobe Networks, 2007, 0-000-1415
  4. Adapted from Leonard's Sweet's "The Weakest Link" Collected Sermons ChristianGlobe Networks, 2007, 0-000-1415
  5. Billy D. Strayhorn, "Rahab: Seven Minutes To Midnight", 2007, 0-000-5686
  6. Leonard Sweet, "Is SO God!" Collected Sermons, ChristianGlobe Networks, 2007, 0-000-1415