Joshua 2:1-9, John 4:16-30

“Seeing God in the midst of sin”

 I spent the morning on Friday watching pigs being guided around a pen by teenagers and younger using something similar to a whip. It was loud and hot and messy, very messy, but the intensity on those kids faces and on the face of the judge was real. Even in the midst of that mess, the talent and the time of the participants shone through. Although I’ve never quite seen pigs fight like they did on that day.

 There is a lot of mess and even sin that is evident around us these days. The determination of the united Penn State players shone through in the midst of the mess and unthinkable sin that the program supported. The heroes who gave their lives so that others might live in the messiness of the Colorado shooting has thankfully shown through that whole ordeal. Sometimes it is hard to see God shining through in the messiness of our lives and even harder at times in the midst of the sin of our lives. But that is where we find ourselves in John today.

 Actually, both of our Scriptures contain people whose lives are messy, even immoral and full of very evident, noticeable sins. But what we find is that God is able to use them for His purposes and means. Is there anyone here who feels as if their lives are mess free, free of the clutter of complications or unexpected events? Of course not, but sometimes that situation weighs pretty heavy on us and we feel as if we are unworthy and that God doesn’t want to waste His time on us, least of all use us. Instead, in our Scripture we hear God say don’t worry, I’ll shine through so that people can see me, can see God, even in the midst of our sin.

 **READ**

The story of Rahab is one of those stories in the Bible that if you don’t want a lot of questions asked then just read it and keep going. If you look at the details, like we will do today, normally more questions come to mind than answers. As we look at it today the sin of Rahab ought to be front and center before us.

 Before we even hear her name in Scripture we are given a descriptive term for her which describes her occupation. She is a prostitute. Joshua the new ruler of Israel sends two of his soldiers to spy out the land and what we read is that they come upon Rahab’s brothel and spend the night there. It seems as if there is enough sin in this story to go around for everyone to take part in it. You see our Secret Service agents were just following an age old custom.

 Then we get word that the king od Jericho is looking for the spies and asks Rahab where they are. She hides them on her roof and then lies to the king and says they already left. We have a story of a prostitute who welcomes Israel’s finest into her brothel and then lies, commits treason against her country. Where is the redeeming value in that?

 Some have argued that she did it because of her faith as it is mentioned in Hebrews 11:31, so it is okay what she did, it was for God’s sake. The ends never justify the means. Never. God will never tell us to go agains his commandments or against his will in order to produce a result that we feel God wants. If God wants us to have a certain result then he will open the path in his own and give us the means that we need for that event to take place. What Rahab did was sin in lying to the king. Her lifestyle and her livelihood was achieved by sinful means and those men sinned to use her services. That is the honest truth about this passage.

 But the story doesn’t end there. God is able to shine in the most brilliant of ways in her life because of her faith. Her life and the life of her family is spared, it is said that she married Joshua, we know for a fact that she is listed as an ancestor of our Savior Jesus Christ. You know, Jesus’ own background is on pretty shaky ground as he was a descendant of a prostitute and a child born out of wedlock, and then he was a runaway child at the age of 12.

 But God sure was able to shine through him. No one in this room was born with worse odds so if God can shine through Jesus, I can guarantee you that God can shine through your in the messiness, in the sin, in the confusion, in whatever you are facing in your life. Don’t let anyone tell you different. Even though Jesus is without sin, his family, his background, his country, his reality was immersed in a world and a people where sin abounded. As we move to the Samaritan woman and her sin you need to hear what I just said and be sure you personalize it to your own life.

 If you are here today and your past has been spotty at best. Maybe you’ve struggled with relationships, they just haven’t worked out. Or maybe alcohol or drugs were a part of your past and you are wondering if God has any use for you at this stage in your life. Maybe you’ve lived a life of self-loathing and just don’t like yourself. Whatever messiness has been a part of your life the message we get today is that God wants to shine through you as a light, putting all that behind if you would let him do that.

 Let’s move on to the Samaritan woman at the well that we began last week. Today we discover why she is at the well at noon and not with the rest of the villagers in the morning or evening. She has had 5 husbands, plus this latest that she is with is not even her husband. She’s not called a prostitute but certainly her morals leave much to be desired. But the beauty of this exchange between her and Jesus is that he does, as she states, know everything about her and still he continues to treat her as if she were like any of us.

 He knows her sin, calls her on it, but still considers her worth it. He still takes the time to explain to her that worship of God does not depend upon a place but upon the believer’s heart. Don’t lose me here, but their whole conversation basically revolves around traditional and contemporary worship and nothing about her or anyone else’s sin. As a result she gets it that Jesus, even knowing everything about her, considers her worth it. You are worth it, every single one of you. We are all worth it because God is able to take our sin in the heat of the day and wash it clean.

 Now, do you notice that she isn’t immediately brought into the fold when Jesus points out her sin? Look at vs. 18 when Jesus calls her out for her personal sin, in vs. 20 she tries to call Jesus out on sin and guilt by association. I mentioned last week that 150 years earlier the Jewish high priest had destroyed the Samaritan place of worship on Mt. Gerizim which was looming behind Jesus and this woman.

 She basically says, yes, okay, you are a prophet, you can see my individual sin, but at least I don’t belong to a group of people who consider oppressing another group as fair. I may have sin but it doesn’t compare to the sin you have because you are an Israelite and you have been oppressing my people for so long.

 It’s a fair argument and often when we are confronted with our sin we refuse to hear it, to believe it, to face it because the messenger who tells us we consider to be a hypocrite or someone whose sin is far worse than our own. So we really don’t have to deal with our sin because they are not dealing with their own sin.

 So, the Samaritan woman isn’t quite ready to let God shine through in the midst of her sin. Jesus answers her and doesn’t justify himself, he doesn’t call her out again, but he comes up with a whole new way of looking at God and so refocuses the conversation back on God and away from either of their supposed sin. He refocuses the conversation on worship where God is able to shine.

 He tells her, those animosities that our people have had are no longer going to exist. In fact, I am ushering a new way to worship. It is no longer the temple in Jerusalem or the mountain of Gerizim where God will be worshipped or where he will reside, but in our hearts. Our broken, sinful lives are the vessels of God’s worship.

 This struck a chord with her. She gets it and she then becomes the spokesperson for Jesus even in the midst of her own sin. It is stated that the community of which John was a part, the early Christian community, had a much higher number of Samaritan believers than was the norm in other communities, so we see that her witness was successful. Here, at least, we see she is able to motivate the entire village to come out and see.

 As a church we are closer to Samaria than to Jerusalem in our worship. But somehow, over these past 180 years God has chosen us to carry the torch of His Gospel and let His light shine in this place called Strasburg. We are as individuals much closer to Rahab and the Samaritan woman than we are to Jesus, but God has chosen people like you and me as individuals to build His future.

 Don’t discard who you are or what you’ve done thinking God can’t use you. He can, and he loves you, and he wants you to be his disciple, and he wants his light to shine through all of us, even in the midst and even in spite of our sin. Amen.