

Text: [Joshua 2:1-21 \(CEB\)](#)

Date: November 30, 2025

Title: “When Pressure is Closing In” – Sanctuary Advent Series, wk 1

Theme: When others feel the squeeze, love and courage create space.

1

In 1939, Irena Sendler was a 29-year-old social worker in Warsaw
Serving the poor of the city – a job she continued even as the
Germans attacked and occupied her nation

When she saw what was happening to Jews in Warsaw – how
they were being herded into the infamous Warsaw ghetto
More than 400,000 people jammed into a space roughly the size
of Central Park
She knew she had to do something

She obtained a permit from officials in Warsaw to enter the ghetto
to conduct sanitary inspections
And under that pretense, she made contact with leaders in Jewish
activist movements inside
At great personal risk, she worked tirelessly to assist Jews

Among other help she provided,
her network saved Jewish lives by smuggling children out of the
ghetto in all kinds of creative ways
Including ambulances and suitcases -
And giving them new identities as Polish Catholics

Then Irena used her contacts at orphanages to place the kids in
homes where they could be kept safe
Always preserving careful records of the original names of the
children and the families where they were placed, in hopes
of reuniting them after the war

Even when she was arrested and tortured by the Gestapo in
1943, she refused to name any of her associates
She was scheduled to be executed, but those in her network
bribed German officials to secure her release
Irena Sendler survived the war, having saved an estimated 2000+
children from death camps
And was later recognized by Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust
Memorial Center, as “Righteous Among the Nations”

2

Irena Sendler lived a truly remarkable, truly courageous life
Whenever I hear a story like hers,
I always wonder what it must have been like to live with the
constant fear of being discovered
And I wonder what I might have done in similar circumstances

In every moment of history when forces put pressure on certain
communities
There are those who step forward to act in solidarity with those
who are threatened
Those who, like Irena Sendler, allow their love to overcome their
fear

Today we’re thinking about those who, when pressure is closing
in, allow some of that pressure to shift onto them
So that those who are most at risk aren’t left carrying it all alone
They use what power and resources they have to create
breathing room for others

Maybe you’ve had this experience yourself:
Of someone standing up for you at work when you were in a
vulnerable position
And you really needed someone to back you up and defend you
to your management – even though it put them at risk

Or maybe YOU were the one who made space for someone else
By advocating hard on behalf of a client or a friend
Maybe you even wondered at the time if you were doing the right
thing
Because someone cautioned you not to take it too far
Well, let this message be a word of validation to you

3

Now, I know this doesn't seem like a Bible story for Advent
Where's the baby Jesus, right?

It's not even a story we talk about a whole lot in the church
But it must have been important to the early Christians
Because it comes up at least three times in the New Testament

Rahab is mentioned by name three times – twice as an example
of what faith DOES
And once – here's the connection to Advent – as one of the very
few WOMEN named in the genealogy of Jesus from
Matthew 1

Rahab's story is part of the bigger narrative of the fall of Jericho
And Israel's conquest of the Promised Land

Now the book of Joshua is not pretty
In fact, it's full of the wholesale slaughter of the original
inhabitants of the land
Under Joshua's leadership, and with what appears to be God's
blessing
In 2025, it's an increasingly difficult book for us to read –
probably the reason we don't talk about it much
Because of all the ways it parallels both our history with the
indigenous peoples of America
As well as the current situation between Israel and Palestine

The book of Joshua contains the kind of very narrow
understanding of God's care for humanity that the book of
Jonah –
that we preached through the past few weeks – is trying to
counteract

But within that broader, and more difficult story of Joshua
We find a very specific act of courageous mercy
By a prostitute in the city of Jericho named Rahab

Rahab, at great personal risk, protects the spies Joshua sent to
check out the land
And through her courage, she becomes part of the story of what
God is doing to save all of humanity

The fact that Rahab is appears in Matthew 1 – one of the very few
women in Jesus' lineage who is named –
Is a detail that tells us everything we need to know about what
God is doing through the life of Jesus
The early Church is not afraid to claim a prostitute as part of
Jesus' family because Jesus' family is for ALL humanity
Including the poor and those who lived at the very edges of
society

Rahab's family was likely very poor and in debt
That was the most common way in ancient times that women
ended up in prostitution

When she discovers that the two men who have come to visit her
are Israelites
She is torn
Presumably, she fears the king, who knows she's been
entertaining these spies

But she also is aware of all the stories that are swirling around the
people of Israel –
about the parting of the Red Sea and the plagues of Egypt
It's clear to her that Israel's God is very powerful
And so she makes them a deal:
If I protect you now,
When your people conquer this land, I expect you to protect me
and my family

They make the deal, and she hangs a scarlet cord from her
window
A sign to Israel to spare her,
just as the blood over the doorposts had been a sign to God at
the Passover to spare the homes of Israelites
And so Rahab's family survives to be part of the story of the
salvation of the world

4

In Hebrew, the name Rahab means “broad” or “spacious”
In this story, her name reminds us of the space she makes for
others

Despite the pressure that's on her from so many directions
From an economic perspective – her family's debt
From a moral perspective – as a woman judged by those around
her for how she earns money to care for her family
From the king – who wants the spies dead
And from the spies themselves, whom she also has reason to fear

In the midst of all this
She finds a way to make space for an understanding
Even with her enemies
And so preserves a name for herself and her family

5

Irena Sendler used her courage and her connections to make
space for a community under extreme, even deadly,
pressure

That's what love looks like sometimes
Creating space for someone else by taking risks
By taking some of the pressure on yourself

I pray that none of us ever lives through another time as horrible
as 1940s Poland

But it's important that we don't ignore the pressures in our own
time

Or pretend that there isn't already immense strain
On immigrant communities
On the trans community
On our black and brown neighbors
On government workers, even the military

People are scared
And when people feel scared
When people feel anxious
Sometimes love looks like courage
Courage that's willing to brace collapsing walls
Just long enough for someone else to get out of danger

The Church is meant to be a place that proclaims the sacred
worth of every person
And is willing to risk something to prove it
Rahab the prostitute shows up in Jesus' genealogy as a
testament to that principle
Irena Sadler lived it during Warsaw's darkest and most difficult
hour

Learn these stories and remember that:
Love sometimes means feeling the squeeze so that someone
else can breathe

We do this not because we need to be heroes or Saviors
We do this because this is our calling as God's people

When people feel like they're suffocating
Our love and courage can create space
For people to breathe in hope

Amen.

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