

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"Jesus' Family Tree"

Scripture: Matthew 1:1-17, Psalm 132:11-12

Opening Hymn: O little town of Bethlehem 164/165

Closing Hymn: Good Christians, all rejoice 141

Children's Hymn: In the bleak mid-winter 145

Choruses: What a beautiful name, Majesty & All hail the power & Jesus name above all names

Choir: (as introit) "The Earliest Christmas Morn" Jay Althouse

Rev. Steve Filyk

December 30, 2018

First Sunday of Christmas

How many of you have spent any time on ancestry.com?

How many of you have a family member who has researched  
Your family tree?

Most of us want to know where we've come from.

It helps us understand our families

And ourselves.

As a child I knew that my grandfather had immigrated to Canada,

That he came with his brothers from the Ukraine,

And that together they homesteaded in Saskatchewan.

A number of years ago I was visiting New York City with my brother.

While we were there, my dad told us to go to Ellis Island.

Ellis Island, you might know,

was the busiest immigrant inspection station in the US

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

My dad told us to go to Ellis Island.

He said that his father's name,

Our grandfather's name,

Was inscribed at the station on a plaque.

This was news to me and my brother,  
So we decided to make the trip.  
There, as promised we found that plaque  
With my grandfather's name.

Seeing it with my own eyes  
gave me a better sense of my own family history.

I saw more clearly that the Filyks were immigrants,  
who like so many others,  
sought a new beginning in a better land.

This is pretty much the furthest I can go into my family history.  
Beyond my grandfather I haven't heard much,  
Though I've read some apocryphal stories.

In Canada our family is among the more recent waves of immigrants.  
Our Canadian roots aren't very deep.

Of course that isn't true for everyone.

One summer I was a student minister  
At a church in Woodstock, New Brunswick.  
Over that summer I made sure to go out  
And visit all the church family.

During one visit I asked my host how long he'd been living in Woodstock.  
His response: "Eight generations"

But eight generations has nothing  
On the genealogy that was read for us this morning.

Matthew describes for us the family tree of Jesus  
And he takes us back 42 generations.  
That's right, 42 generations.

It seems maybe odd for us to encounter a genealogy  
At the beginning of Matthew's story.

And yet it would seem that just as we understand ourselves better  
When we know our own histories,  
that Jesus is somehow more fully revealed  
When we encounter his lineage,  
And see the members of his family tree.

So what does this history disclose?  
What is the Gospel writer,  
What is Matthew trying to show us?

It would seem that first of all  
Matthew is reminding us that Jesus is a Jew,  
That is an 'authentic' Jew, a son of Abraham.

In the second century  
a Greek philosopher named Celcus  
Is credited with claiming that "Jesus's father  
was a Roman soldier named Panthera".<sup>i</sup>

Given Jesus' virgin birth,  
It is very possible that rumors about his origin  
were circulating during his lifetime.

What Matthew makes clear  
 Is that through Joseph, Jesus is connected  
 To the father of the Jewish nation.

But more than that just connecting him to the patriarch Abraham.  
 This also connects Jesus to those promises  
 that God made to Abraham.

*I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you.  
 I will make your name great...  
 I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you  
 I will curse.*

*And all people on earth will be blessed through you...*<sup>ii</sup>

As Paul interprets these promises in Galatians,  
 It is through Jesus that the blessing is received by the nations.<sup>iii</sup>  
 In this way Jesus is connected both to Abraham  
 And the entire world.

Matthew wants us to know that Jesus is a son of Abraham.  
 And Matthew also wants us to see that Jesus is  
 A descendant of David.

This is declared in bold at the outset of Matthew's introduction:  
 "This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David..."<sup>iv</sup>

The genealogy itself traces Jesus' royal lineage.

All of this is meant to disclose  
 That as a descendent of David  
 Jesus is “no usurper  
 but is the legitimate ruler of God’s people.”<sup>v</sup>

In this way we invited to make the connection  
 That Jesus is the promised descendent  
 That had been longed for by God’s people,  
 The one that Isaiah speaks about saying:

“For to us a child is born,  
 to us a son is given,  
 and the government will be on his shoulders.  
 And he will be called  
 Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
 Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
 Of the greatness of his government and peace  
 there will be no end.

He will reign on David’s throne  
 and over his kingdom,  
 establishing and upholding it  
 with justice and righteousness  
 from that time on and forever.”<sup>vi</sup>

Matthew wants us to know that Jesus is an authentic Jew  
 Who also had a royal lineage.  
 He asserts that Jesus is the Messiah  
 the people had been waiting for  
 Even if his ancestry is traced through his step-dad.

But Matthew's genealogy does more than exalt Jesus.

The genealogy also tells us about the sort of people God works through  
To bring about God's plans.

What is interesting about the family tree  
Is the great variety of characters that are included.

There are ancestors who are remembered for their faith,  
people like Abraham and Ruth.

And there are relatives with mixed legacies.

David was a man who was after God's own heart,  
But he was a murderer and adulterer.

David's son, Solomon is remembered as the wisest king ever  
And yet he was led astray by his many wives.

The list also includes con-artists like Jacob  
who cheated his brother out of an inheritance.

And there are women with non-conforming sexual histories.  
Tamar tricked her father-in-law into getting her pregnant,  
While Rahab worked as a prostitute.

Other ancestors are infamous  
for completely ignoring and disobeying God.  
Ancestors like Ahaz and Manasseh.

Manasseh did not follow in his father, king Hezekiah's footsteps.  
In fact he "reversed Hezekiah's reforms,  
Bringing in all kinds of idolatry...

He killed off prophets, erected idols in God's temple,  
 And sacrificed his own sons on the altar of a heathen god."<sup>vii</sup>

Now that's quite the family that Jesus has.

It's even more interesting when you realise  
 that Matthew is being selective.

While he overlooked some of Jesus' ancestors  
 He didn't omit those characters  
 That others might otherwise want to gloss over and forget.

PAUSE

Maybe you spent some time this Christmas season  
 Thinking about that odd group that you call family.

There is your brother who is successful and responsible.  
 He has two homes and every year takes long trips abroad.  
 He's successful and he knows it.  
 And he makes everyone feel small.

There is the uncle that has kept himself scarce,  
 avoiding family functions,  
 Ever since he was convicted of fraud  
 and spent time in jail.

There is the aunt who despite her Christian upbringing  
 Refuses to darken the doorway of a church  
 Even at Christmas

There is your sister who just left her husband.  
 She caught him in his third affair  
 And finally called it quits.

And then there is you.  
 A recovering alcoholic,  
 Who has made it through yet another Christmas  
 Without a bottle to keep yourself company,

Despite the fact you really could have used it.

Maybe you noticed brokenness in your family this Christmas.

Well if you look closely at Matthew's genealogy,  
 You'll notice that Jesus, the authentic Jew,  
 The royal descendent, also had a broken family.

And if God can work out God's purposes  
 Through all the lying, scheming, and just plain godlessness  
 Of Jesus' ancestors,  
 Then God can surely work out his purposes  
 In a family like yours.

May we see God at work in our families  
 In the year that awaits us. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> "Tiberius Julius Abdes Pantera" *Wikipedia*

<sup>ii</sup> See Genesis 12:3

<sup>iii</sup> See Galatians 3:14

<sup>iv</sup> Matthew 1:1 NIV

<sup>v</sup> Douglas R. A. Hare *Matthew* 6

<sup>vi</sup> Isaiah 9:6-7 NIV

<sup>vii</sup> From the notes by Philip Yancey and Tim Stafford in *The Student Bible* NIV, 364.