

## **Preaching for Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Reno, NV**

### **Pastor Scott Trevithick**

Date: November 27, 2022, Yr. A, First Sunday of Advent

Using Sanctified Art "From Generation to Generation" theme and designated readings (Adapted from the Lectionary)

Text: Matthew 1:1-17. Isaiah 2:1-5

Title: "There's Room for Every Story"

Focus: There are unexpected people in Jesus' family story. There may be parts of our family stories that are unexpected or messy or of which we may be ashamed. God's ability to use unexpected people and situations is a source of hope for all of us.

### **When College Students Meet. . .**

I have a quiz question for you. It's the same one I asked my niece Zoe when we saw my brother John and his family for Thanksgiving. Zoe is a first-year college student at Cal.

Here's the quiz question: What are the two most frequent questions first year students ask of each other? (Think in your head . . . Call out what you think. . .)

- **Where are you from?**
- **What's your major?**

Essentially, those two questions are the best, shorthand way of beginning to get to know someone. Or at least getting to know a fellow student on a college campus.

### **Matthew Tells a Story**

Though gospel writer Matthew isn't a college freshman and isn't introducing himself, he does have a particular task or intent. He wants to concisely and meaningfully introduce his audience or readers to Jesus. So, that task is similar to the self-introduction scenarios I posed to you. Matthew is asking himself:

- How do I help my readers understand something important about Jesus?

### **We are Shaped by Our Families of Origin**

A few weeks ago on All Saints Sunday on November 6, I started the sermon by stating a basic truth: **We are all shaped by our birth family or family of origin.** Then I told you about my family and mentioned my mom and dad, my Grandma and Grandpa T, Grandpa Moes and Grandma Betty on my mom's side, and my sister Agda and brother John. I told you how I was shaped by my family and by my mother's death when I was 6.

That story isn't likely the first one I would tell about myself upon meeting someone, but it is a part of my story and it has shaped me.

There are all kinds of ways that Matthew could have introduced us to Jesus, but he starts by telling a family story. This is the family that shaped Jesus. This family story helps create his identity.

But, "Uggh!" you may have groaned. It's just a genealogy. It's just a list. It's not really a story. It's kind of boring.

Well, yeah. I can see how you might think that or at least how that could be your initial reaction. But if you knew some of these names, some of these people, no way could you say they were boring. (Let's come back to this in a bit.)

## Matthew Introduces Us to Jesus

Each of the gospel writers tell the story of Jesus differently from one another. They all have their own distinctions. Matthew emphasizes Jesus' Jewish heritage and his connection to all these people.

- Matthew wants to tell us that **Jesus is connected to all these people**—these are the family members who have shaped him.
- Matthew believes that in order to know Jesus, you need to know his family. In this case, his extended family

What could we say about them? Or what do you notice in this list of names? Who sticks out to you? You might say to yourself:

- "It's just a bunch of men's names, isn't it?"
- *Droning voice*: "Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob. 'Father of him, who was the father of him, who was the father of. . .'"

Ooo, you missed something—or someone.

In this list of men's names, with "father of, father of," in this "patrilineal" genealogy, what's Tamar doing in there? Or Rahab or Ruth?

Did you notice that? Against expectations, Matthew included all these women in the family story of Jesus. Five different women. What are their stories and how do they shape Jesus and what is Matthew's intent in including them—countering expectation of a *patrilineal* genealogy.

He defies convention to include these five remarkable women.

- **Tamar** was vulnerable after her husband Er died, who was the oldest son of Judah. Tamar was left out of the family and mistreated by them and yet she persisted in order to create a future for herself and her family. (Genesis 38) By including her story, Matthew takes something that is potentially embarrassing about a family's mistreatment and when the odds were definitely not in her favor, was resourceful enough to find a way.
- **Rahab** was the one who sheltered the scouts who were sent out by Joshua into Jericho. She was an outsider—even in a very literal sense. Her house was between two walls on the outside of the city. At great risk to herself, she provided shelter to the advance scouts that came to her, even hiding them on her roof outside her house when authorities came to ask about them. Through her courage and tenacity, she secured a future for herself. (Joshua 2)
- **Ruth** was an outsider as well; she was from Moab. After she married, her husband Mahlon died and she was without a husband or children. Widowed, childless, and a foreigner was not a good situation. Pain and loss fill her story and she is at a turning point. Rather than go back to her home country, she stayed with her mother-in-law Naomi and was fiercely loyal to her. They traveled to Bethlehem, where with Naomi's guidance, she meets Boaz, who is a relative of Naomi's. Ruth is described as a woman of integrity. Her boldness and tenacity create a way where there seems to have been no way, which is a human reflection of the love and faithfulness of God.
- The inclusion of these four women leads culminates in the inclusion of **Mary**, the mother of Jesus.
- We could examine and include more detail from any of the others as well. . .

### **David: Both honorable and despicable**

David was both pleasing to God and also engaged in selfish, despicable acts. His story intertwines with the fourth woman in this story, Bathsheba, who isn't even mentioned by name, but is referred to as "The wife of Uriah."

- On the one hand, when David was a boy, he was the one who comforted King Saul during his periods of rage with a lyre and who slayed Goliath with a stone in his slingshot, a skill he had learned while protecting his father's sheep from predators.<sup>1</sup>
- On the other hand, his orders directly resulted in the death of Uriah, who was a soldier in David's own army and stubbornly honorable man, both to his wife Bathsheba and to his troops.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Samuel 16:23; 17:50

While Uriah is away with the troops in battle, David sees Bathsheba from his palace. She is so beautiful that he is overcome and summons her. He is the king—what can she do? She becomes pregnant by David and of course Uriah has been away and David has to cover up what he has done. He summons Uriah under the pretense that he wants to learn about how the war is going. He directs Uriah to go home and lie with his wife, but Uriah does not.

For a second day, David wines and dines Uriah and then urges him again to go home to be with his wife. With the result being, of course, that he will lie with her and David's selfish power move which has resulted in Bathsheba becoming pregnant will not be uncovered. Uriah, honorable as he is, actually refuses to go see his wife, reasoning that he cannot be in comfort while his men are in battle.

After two days of David trying this tactic, David sends Uriah back to the troops. He includes with him an order that when the fighting is the most dangerous, the troops shall withdraw from around Uriah, so that he is left vulnerable. Uriah is killed (2 Samuel 11).

Collectively, these are stories of

- Hardship
- Brokenness and pain
- Of some people who are victims, but who also display courage and resiliency.
- Of some who are perpetrators—who take advantage of others and who abuse the power they have or the trust which others extend to them.
- Some, like David, who is mentioned in the very first sentence, are complex people who both honored and pleased God and who behaved despicably as well.

## **What Does this Say about Who God Is?**

A good habit to have when reading and making sense of a particular passage of scripture is to ask yourself,

- What does this passage say about God or Jesus?
- A second question is like is and relies in part on the response to the first:
  - What does this say about humankind or about me in light of what it says about who God is?

**What does this story say about God?** God has the amazing power, ability, and inclination to choose the most unlikely people to accomplish that which God intends. God has the power to bring good out of what others have intended for harm. God can redeem or bring life out of pain and loss and situations that seemed most bleak.

As you see some of these people in Jesus' family story, you begin to see Jesus. And as you think about the story of Jesus and this larger family story, then maybe you think about yourself and your own family story. And, if you ask yourself, "What does this story say about God?" or "What does it say about Jesus?" then you might have another "aha!" moment as you ask yourself, "What does this story say about who I am or humankind is in light of that?"

Hmmm. And you might recognize, "My family story has brokenness. Pain. Hardship. Favoritism. Mistreatment. Some rotten things that people did to each other or had done to them. . ."

If you're recognizing that your family story has brokenness and pain in it and then you see that the story that Matthew tells about Jesus is truly a family story and not just a boring list of names, then that's where your "Aha" moment might come:

"Wait a minute—if my family story has all this wackiness and pain and brokenness in it and I see Jesus' family story also has all this pain and brokenness in it AND also that Matthew tells me that this Jesus is the Messiah, the one humankind has been waiting for, and God can work through all this brokenness in the life or family story of Jesus, the one coming to save humankind, then 'aha!' can't God work through me in all my brokenness?"

**"There's a place for every story"** is the way that the folks from *Sanctified Art* express this.

God can redeem or work through you and your story and whatever loss and pain and brokenness you may have experienced. **Thanks be to God.**