

Sermon From Lineage to Legacy
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Olivet Congregational Church, UCC
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SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 2:1-5

²The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

² In days to come the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it.

³ Many peoples shall come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.'

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

⁴ He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

⁵ O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!

Matthew 1:1-17

The Gospel According to Matthew
The Genealogy of Jesus the Messiah

An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

²Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram, ⁴and Aram the father of Aminadab, and Aminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶and Jesse the father of King David.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah,⁷ and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph,⁸ and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah,⁹ and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,¹⁰ and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah,¹¹ and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

12 And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel, and Salathiel the father of Zerubbabel,¹³ and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor,¹⁴ and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud,¹⁵ and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob,¹⁶ and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.

17 So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.

SERMON From Lineage to Legacy

I have a children' book, Adoption is for Always, by Linda Walvoord Girard. It was on the shelf of books for sale in the children's section of my town library a number of years ago. I thought it might come in handy at some point, either to share during a Sunday school class, in a children's message or with my grandchildren. I had purchased it while my daughter and son-in-law were foster parents to an infant and her 4 and 17 year old siblings. The mother of these children was able to have them returned to her so they did not become permanent part of our family.

The book is about Celia, an adopted young girl. Her parents had told her she was adopted since she was tiny. But one day, when she was school age, she and her parents were sitting on the swing on her porch. Her mom told her that they had bought that swing after they had

adopted her. That is when Celia really heard the word “adopted.” The word brought out all sorts of feelings and questions. The book shared the story of that young girl as she came to accept that she was adopted and how she came feel good about it.

In today’s reading from Matthew’s gospel, we hear the genealogy of Jesus. We hear 42 names, divided into 3 groups of 14 generations. It’s the lineage of David that we hear about as to why Joseph and a pregnant Mary are headed to Bethlehem to register for the census. It’s a lineage that extends all the way back to Abraham. We hear the genealogy of Jesus through the family tree of Joseph. We don’t hear the genealogy of Jesus through Mary. We hear it through Joseph, Jesus’ adopted father. Adoption.

Have you ever thought about Jesus’ lineage as being through his adoptive father? Joseph’s lineage is what enabled Jesus to be the Messiah, the King, the fulfillment of God’s promise to the Jewish people.

In his book, **All I Really Want, Readings for a Modern Christmas**, UCC devotional writer and adoptive father, Quinn Caldwell, writes a devotional based on Joseph’s adoption of Jesus; that which made Jesus a part of that faithful family, part of that faithful Jewish lineage. Quinn writes, “This, I believe, is not accident. The story of the people of our God is the story of adoption. It’s the story of a God who makes a way where there is no way, who makes a people where there is no people. It’s the story of a God who was once born into the world needing to be adopted himself and who found a great forever family. A God who says over and over and over, ‘This family is nuts, but if you want in, we’ll take you.’ Who will never leave the foreigner, the orphan, or you, without a family if you want one.”

And what a family it was, an unconventional one at best, with an unconventional beginning. It's the family of an elderly, childless, faithful man, Abram, called by God to lead God's people. God and Abraham entered into quite a relationship over the latter years of Abraham's life. And though Abraham's wife was barren, God promised Abraham and his wife Sarah, a son. And through that son, God promised Abraham descendants as numerous as the stars. God brought Abraham "outside and said, 'Look towards heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' And he believed the LORD; and the LORD * reckoned it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15: 5-6) Such faith. Such a promise.

And as the story of the Jewish people unfolds through time, as we hear the names of those key persons in that lineage, there are familiar names. We hear Isaac, Jacob, King David, and Solomon. There are names that are not familiar. And mixed in with them, we hear the names of women. Yes, these women were important in the lineage of Joseph, the lineage of Jesus. Tamar. Rahab. Ruth. Bathsheba. But they are not presented as stellar women of great character. Tamar slept with Judah, her father – in – law and conceived Perez. However her father in law had not fulfilled his responsibility toward her after his son died and Tamar continued the lineage through him. Rahab, was identified as the prostitute in Jericho. But she did not sleep with Israelite spies, but instead sheltered and protected them and struck up a deal that they would protect her family when the Israelites invaded Jericho. Ruth was a widow and Moabite who accompanied her widowed mother-in-law from Moab back to Bethlehem. And on the advice of Naomi, gets Boaz to notice her, sleeps with him, and has his son. Bathsheba, was the wife of Uriah and was not even given a name in this genealogy. It was she whom King David had brought to him so he could have sex with her and who arranged it so her husband would

be killed in battle. She bore David's son. Through these women, the lineage to Jesus continued.

And there's Mary. In Matthew's gospel, Mary is mentioned by virtue of her relationship to Joseph, "the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah." In Matthew's gospel, Joseph learns that Mary is pregnant with God's Son through the Holy Spirit. There is no mention of the Angel Gabriel appearing to Mary, her "yes" to God or of Mary's visit to Elizabeth that we hear about in Luke's gospel. But Matthew's gospel is geared to his Jewish audience who are early followers of Jesus. So for Matthew, Jesus' lineage is important.

Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman, the artist behind the image on your bulletin cover and in your Advent Devotional booklet*, explained her thought processes in creating this image of the women in Jesus' genealogy. She shares her initial sentiments through what she had been taught about them. "In my experience, it seemed the primary function of recounting their lives was to show how broken and sinful they were, and how, despite their brokenness, God was merciful enough to use them." But she continued on; that after spending time with their stories in scripture, she could see beyond the labels that have been placed on these women.

She explained, "What I realized was that these women—despite the loathsome, corrupt systems they were in—found a way to claim their voice and found enough power to survive." And in using the rose in the center of her art, representing Christ, she was able to envision these women as "foundational leaves building and upholding Christ. All of the women are looking at the viewer and holding objects to represent the fact that they took their life and survival into their own hands. They were catalysts who propelled the lineage forward."

“In the bottom left, **Tamar** holds her father-in-law’s insignia, which represents how she assumes his role as the leader of the tribe of Judah and continues its lineage.

Moving counterclockwise, **Rahab** holds the red cord which she lowered to ensure the safety of her family after supplying Israelite spies enough information

to achieve victory in Jericho.

Next, **Ruth** holds the wheat that she gleaned from the field. She knows that she must marry again in order to be protected, and so she takes initiative with Boaz.

Bathsheba’s name isn’t even mentioned in Christ’s genealogy; she is referred to as the “**wife of Uriah.**” She withstands abuse from King David, survives the murder of her husband, and ensures that her son Solomon takes the throne...

Finally, there is **Mary** who looks adoringly at the rose which represents her son. Here she holds the love and pride of a beautiful lineage that leads to the birth of her son, the Messiah.

These women only wanted to ensure safety for themselves and for their children; in the process they ensured the continuation of the lineage of Christ. Without their brilliance, passion, ingenuity, resourcefulness, creativity, and sacrifice, the lineage would have ended.”

As we look upon the lineage of Joseph, the adoptive father of Jesus, we see unlikely and imperfect people living in imperfect times, across years and generations. Whether they were male or female, they served their God in their time and place with what they had to offer. God used their lives to make it possible for Messiah to be born. God used their lives to keep hope alive.

This first Sunday of Advent, a time when we anticipate and prepare for the birth of Jesus we light the Hope candle. We hope. There is lots of room for hope in our world, as there has been across time; not unlike the wounded world in the time of the prophet, Isaiah.

There is hope for that world of which Isaiah speaks. It's a world, where God overturns the way of war and replaces war with peace. It's a world where all nations - all people – will stream to God's mountain top. There God will arbitrate for justice among all nations for all people. And righteousness and peace will prevail as tools of war – swords and spears – will be transformed into tools of agriculture – plowshares and pruning hooks. There is hope in this transformation, but it's not an instantaneous thing.

These instruments of planting and pruning are part of a process, of preparing the soil to receive seeds and of removing dead branches from trees or plants to facilitate growth. They are part of the dedication and work that are necessary to achieve a bountiful harvest; just as learning to live in peace requires dedication and hard work. And as people work for peace, they walk together in God's light; the light of Jesus' love

So we enter Advent and light the Advent Candle of Hope. Recalling the imperfect lives of the imperfect family of Jesus can give us hope. Just as God used imperfect people to as forebears of Jesus, God calls each of us to birth the love that is Jesus. And God calls each of us to hope.

God gives us each gifts to use and empowers us to use them in love and to bring hope. Maybe we are called to witness to Jesus' inclusive love through our actions in reaching out to others. Maybe we are called to heal relationships. There is much division in our country. Maybe we

are called to speak to those with whom we disagree and share our stories; to gain better understanding of one another, to come together behind something we have in common.

So what is God calling you to do this Advent as you prepare to receive Jesus or to bring about hope? Is it something you are doing now, but need to feel recharged to continue? Is it something that you have always wanted to do, but never felt it was the right time? Are you not quite sure what it is but you need the courage to step out into the unknown? Reverend Dr. Howard Thurman is once said, “Do not ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and do it, for what the world needs is people who have come alive.” What makes you come alive? What is your passion?

We are all children of God, part of God’s “great forever family.” All people are. But when we decided to follow Jesus as Christians, we became members of the Christian family. We are part of that imperfect lineage of imperfect people, now trying to carry on the legacy of Jesus. And just as God empowered those who came before Jesus, we are empowered by God. This Advent, let us ask ourselves, how is God empowering us, as children of God and members of Jesus’ family, to be part of Jesus’ birth and legacy; and to convey love and hope?

*Devotional and Advent Theme of From Generation to Generation by sanctifiedart.org / FROM generation to generation / There's room for every story/ The First Sunday of Advent

