

## ***Making Room***

A Message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

November 27, 2022

by Rev. Dave Le Grand

Our heritage, the names and the stories that get passed onto us. This Gospel reading this morning from the writer Luke lays out the heritage of Jesus, the ancestors before him. We respond after reading this story by acknowledging the names of those who, and the stories that, *formed us* – not just to acknowledge, though, but then to share with others what and who is significant to us. What are the sacred stories and myths of our forebears?

For example, my middle name is “Winston”, my father’s first name – a name that he always proudly proclaims is borrowed from Winston Churchill, who inspired the British to survive the onslaught of Nazi Blitzkrieg. The names of our children, Benjamin and Sophia, were both drawn from biblical story – Benjamin, one of the twelve tribes of Israel – remember the brothers of precocious, even self-absorbed, Joseph in the Hebrew Scriptures? He was bullied by his brothers because he received a special coat, but his brother *Benjamin* always loved him. *Sophia* is the Greek word for Wisdom. Our hope is that she wears that well, accompanied in Love through her ups and downs of life.

What are names of people in your loving circles – family and friends? Are there stories behind any of the names that speak of heroes or significant ancestors?

Are there people in your family history who, if you were truly being honest, are omitted? We present who we want to, sometimes we might skew the story, excluding some stories and embellishing others.

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke have many stories in common, but they are profoundly their listing of the lineage linking baby Jesus to his Hebrew roots. Luke tells epic stories of angels making birth announcements to the soon-to-be parents of holy children. There is wonder in the birth stories, and angels appearing to sleepy shepherds. Then, in chapter 3, Luke lists rather quickly the line of male ancestors of Jesus.

Matthew starts the whole book with family history. Again listing the who *begat* whom. Interesting, it is largely males who are mentioned. But, those of us who know Jewish tradition would see a problem here; the Jewish line is matrilinear – that is, Jewishness is passed from mother to daughter, not from father to son.

But read again the family tree of Matthew and you will hear references to five women. Bev Chapman helpfully summarized the stories in the blurb that accompanies the artwork, Genealogy of Christ. She points out:

There is **Tamar** who assumed her father’s role as leader of the tribe of Judah. Next is **Rahab** who holds the red chord she lowered to ensure the safety of her family after assisting the Israelites to achieve victory at Jericho. Then comes

**Ruth** who must remarry to be protected and so takes the initiative with Boaz. The fourth woman is **Bathsheba** who, by a modern reading of the story, is pursued by King David. She has survived great hardship and ensures that her son Solomon takes the throne. Finally, there is **Mary** who smiles lovingly on her son, Christ, the rose.

Suffice to say, women of ancient times endured great hardship, and often their names were not celebrated, not even mentioned, more implied.

This ancestry of Jesus is messy. It isn't even factually accurate by our modern standards. Think about the messy storyline of father-to-be Joseph, not even the biological father of Jesus. In Matthew's Gospel there is Joseph in the bloodline lineage, thereby linking Jesus to King David, and proclaiming Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah.

Messy genealogy, but hold on, now. For those of us with complicated family stories, maybe this is good news indeed. Family is not just about bloodlines, it is about a history, her-story too. Reclaiming the stories that family members are afraid to utter. Jesus was a product of heroes and cowards alike, and that King David in his family tree, his heroism and faith are legend, but rarely do we speak of how he set up Bathsheba's husband to die on the battlefield so he could take Bathsheba as his wife.

This world we navigate tends to tell us to present ourselves in certain ways. That is not at all to say we should misrepresent ourselves or our heritage, but would it be accurate to say that we "tend" to omit the names of the eccentric, the disturbing, the odd aspects of our family trees? I will say that I enjoy when my father, Winston, has a glass or two of wine and tells the ancestral stories with zeal that I usually don't get to hear. Watch the television series "The Crown" and you will find a slant on the Royal Family tree that has its own eccentricities, stories that were kept hidden.

Here's the thing, messy as it is, this journey of Advent, preparing for Christmas is filled with wonder in part BECAUSE of the mess, the scandal, the curses, and the blessings.

This Advent, let us make space in our hearts, in our homes, in our Christmas, for the messy realities – our broken relationships along with the healing. How do we make room for brokenness in our Hallmark-branded Christmas? There is a perfection about the stores already, yet, theologically, we know that at the heart of Christmas is a teenage mother-to-be, surely judged by many around her. The angels appearing, saying "Be not afraid" – I'm man enough to say that I'd be afraid seeing an angel appear in my room. The stable where God's beloved is born – I'm sure this scene will not appear in the displays at Bed Bath and Beyond!

The Advent journey has begun, friends, and I invite you to embrace the cognitive dissonance – the conflict between our core Christmas story grounded in simplicity and real lived challenges, and the narrative that culture has created for us so we can live, well, in way that is anything but simply and humbly.

I wonder: Can we reclaim simplicity, decluttering our Christmas so that we are open to the people and stories that Hallmark movies tempt us to ignore? Amen.



Genealogy of Christ

by Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

Digital painting

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