

Why Bother? A sermon preached from a series on the family tree of Jesus in Matthew 1 on Sunday December 2, 2018, at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons: ISAIAH 9:2-7
MATTHEW 1:1-6

In his second letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul writes

¹⁶ All scripture is inspired by God and is^[a] useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. (II Tim. 3:16-17)

That is unquestionably true.

But then you come across the opening chapter of Matthew's Gospel and St. Paul's declaration becomes sorely tested. All scripture – really???? All we have is the genealogy of Jesus – his family tree through Joseph.

What I grew up knowing as the “begats”

As you read or hear the lesson read, or look at the whole of the first chapter of Matthew does it make you feel a bit like the little boy who one Sunday morning leaned over to his mother and in a

stage whisper said – Mommy I’m bored – let’s pay the man and go home!

I was like that little boy more than once in worship services.

I was always wanting my home church minister to get to the good stuff – the narrative stories, the Biblical personalities.

And I can assure you as a little kid, I would have started twitching when I heard the genealogy of Jesus read.

Over the years though I have learned and now better understand that we need to hear, To consider and to reflect on what many might believe to be “the more boring parts of scripture” – for they give important context to the “good stuff” That is, these so called boring sections fill in important and necessary details about the “good stuff”

In this case,

They enrich the events surrounding the angels,

The journey to Bethlehem,

The significance of Joseph and Mary being Jesus’ earthly parents.

So it is with Matthew 1 – the genealogy of Jesus – the family history – the Biblical equivalent to “who do you think you are?”

is where we are going to linger these 4 Sundays in Advent

Why?

To provide context to Jesus' coming as a small baby.
 To realize again that | Jesus coming as a small baby
 is part of detailed plan set out by God way back in
 chapter 3 of Genesis

To see – perhaps for the first time – the ways God
 breaks in and breaks through human mulishness,
 apathy and continues to work out his plan and
 purposes.

As we shall see the family tree of Jesus has some
 surprising twists and turns.

Like the family history of most of us,
 Jesus' history contains shall we say interesting
 ancestors.

This morning I want to make some general
 comments about the family history of Jesus as set
 down in Matthew 1,

Then in the remaining 3 weeks of Advent highlight
 some specific individuals listed. For this is a rich,
 intricate, fulsome and wonderful family from which
 Jesus comes.

The family history of Jesus reminds us of
 God's *continuing power to oversee, plan and work out
 his purposes in our lives.*

Though Matthew 1 may seem like a random
 collection of names, more careful reflection shows
 that Jesus' family tree is anything but.

*The theme of promise – God's promise – runs through
 chapter 1 as does the theme of covenant with God.*

Read the names and some are certainly more familiar than others,
 Their stories more well-known and one thing that stands out is just when it looks as if God's purposes, plan and promise seem to be on the skids because the human carriers have fumbled the promise or are running in the wrong direction,
 Someone and not necessarily the one we might think, becomes the heir to God's promise.

Take for instance, the Biblical first family – whose story is told in the book of Genesis
 Each one of them is a fallible human being.
 At one point, Abraham threatens to sell his wife to invaders in order to save his own skin.
 Jacob – his story is one of deception and trickery of others – particularly brother Esau
 Then one moves to the Old Testament books of Samuel where we read of David – chosen by God.
 Said to be the greatest king in Israel and a lynch pin in the claim that Jesus is the long promised Messiah.
 But in the course of his life, David was a murderer and adulterer.

And yet through these very human and fallible people, God's promise continues forward.

I think that is incredibly encouraging and hopeful,
 Especially to those who think and believe that they have sunk so low in their lives that they see themselves as unredeemable in the eyes of God.

God could never use them for His plans and purposes!

Who says so?

Inner voices or outer voices that say you are no good, useless, worthless?

Pay No attention to those voices!!

Listen to the clearer, stronger, more truthful voice that says – you are worthy, you are important and significant to me, the Lord

There is a beautiful contemporary chorus – *No Longer Slaves* – that we would do well to remember and to pray for ourselves and for others we may see in that position of believing themselves to be worthless and of no use or purpose to God

I think the refrain speaks particularly to us

I'm no longer a slave to fear

I am a child of God

I'm no longer a slave to fear

I am a child of God.

God continues to work through the most broken of lives

God so wants to break through that shell or defensive armour of shame, guilt, anger, despair, unhealed memories that has written all over it – *Nobody cares about me!*

Stuff and nonsense! God has the power to oversee, plan and work out his purposes in our lives.

HE DOES CARE FOR EACH OF US.

The family tree of Jesus also reminds us that though God can and does break in at specific times and for specific reasons,
God's plans, purposes and promises operate more often in the long view perspective.

Take for instance the promise of Messiah – One who would redress the disobedience and consequent reaction of distancing oneself from God.

There are 40 names listed in the family tree before we get to Jesus

42 generations before Matthew cites **now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way.**

Family tree practitioners –how many can go back that far.

I can take my Dad's side of the family back to the 1830's and that is 3 generations

My mother's side, 5 generations to the 1790's.

Whatever way you look at it, the family tree of Jesus covers a long period of time.

Today,

We live in that time between Jesus' first Advent –his coming as a small baby – the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke

And Jesus' Second Advent – his promised return as King and Risen Lord of time and history

For that Advent, we are still WAITING as it were.

For hundreds of years, the people, the prophets, the poets and the historians of the Old Testament waited for Messiah....

At God's appointed time, Messiah came and lived among us

And is very much with us still by the power of His Holy Spirit.

We now wait for his promised return.

Many years ago, I was taught a piece of counsel and wisdom that continues to serve me well – personally and professionally

It is a piece of counsel our girls dislike immensely – they have heard Dad too much – yet each of them knows it to be true.

The counsel –*most of the Christian life is spent learning to wait.*

And the corollary to that is *as important as it is to learn to wait, it is equally significant to know what it is for which we wait.*

Waiting for Messiah was a long term wait. I suspect at times the people became impatient – like children on a long or not so long car trip ask every 10 minutes –ARE WE THERE YET?

I suspect that some began to think it was all a hoax – there was to be no Messiah.

But the family tree reminds us that in *God's time – kairos, not chronos – God in Jesus came and dwelt among us,*

As John so poetically phrases that moment

**And the Word became flesh and lived among us,
and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a
father's only son, full of grace and truth (John
1:14)**

In a like manner, some of us are impatient children
on a car trip – ARE WE THERE YET?

Is Jesus' return imminent?

Some believe so and point to signs that say Jesus is
going to return sooner rather than later.

Perhaps! Though as the mentor who taught me
about learning to wait, also said at another point –
who knows, we may be among the first Christians?
Advent highlights that sense of waiting and hope.

For of the Second Coming of Jesus we must not be
in any doubt.

He shall return. The time and place is God's call –
not ours.

At the same time, we must always be ready and
prepared – not in the sense of heightened anxiety,
But in the sense so well summarized in the collect
from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer for the
first Sunday in Advent.

...for it addresses preparedness as part of every
day.

Let me close with that prayer....

**Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast
away the works of darkness, and put upon us the
armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life,**

in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty, to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, now and ever.

AMEN