

Bring on the ladies. The second in a sermon series preached for Advent on Matthew 1 at St. Giles Presbyterian Church, Prince George, December 9, 2018 by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons; MATTHEW 1:7-11
GALATIANS 3:26-29

The Bible is filled with amazing stories, parables, poetry and historical accounts,
As well as first person recollections.

It is true that the Bible does have some less interesting sections – the listing of the laws in the Old Testament book of Leviticus and the genealogies or family history of Jesus in Matthew and Luke

Face it! On first or even second reading a family history is not usually very interesting to others – especially if it is only a list of names and dates

But expand on the names by way of photos or a family lore incident,
Or see the family members in the broader context of what was going on in the world around them,
And suddenly even the most boring of family trees are very engaging.

For example, my great aunt Ett – her full name was Henrietta,
She was a twin sister of my grandfather.

I never met either of them in this life – both died shortly before I was born.

But I do have pictures of them and I have stories about both of them.

Aunt Ett had a head for figures and probably today would be a financial planner or hedge fund manager.

In her time though all she could do – and she did it well – was to invest in stocks, bond and property. Her canniness enabled her to survive the Depression financially intact.

All that is interesting in terms of my family tree – but what has always intrigued me and made me wish I could have met her is that Aunt Ett had a glass eye which she made use of – said my Dad – many times to maximum effect.

Aunt Ett was a physically large woman who wore spectacular hats and dressed in what used to be called costumes – tailored suits for women. That is evident from the pictures I have of her. Her mere presence in any gathering would not be missed.

But the glass eye was the kicker. For more than once if she felt she was being dismissed as just a woman in a male dominated world, the eye would come out and be placed on a table or counter for all to see. That certainly got everyone's attention

When Aunt Ett knew she had the floor, she reached down, cleaned the eye and replaced it.

She then began, "I regret having to do that, but you were not prepared to listen to my opinion, experience or view of the matter.

I was not being taken seriously.

I mean business and I hope I do not have to resort again to doing what I have just done.

I will respect your opinion of view and YOU will respect mine".

WOW! I mean, WOW

What hutzpah Great Aunt Ett had.

And she's part of my family tree!!!

Well, as far as we know, none of the 40 people listed in Matthew 1 or in the 42 generations had a glass eye

But when we examine Jesus' family tree in Matthew 1

We see a whole lot of names.

Some familiar and some not

What is very significant though is that in a male dominated society in which Matthew sets down Jesus' family tree, there are the names of 5 women – Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba and Mary.

Four are foreigners

Two are prostitutes

Two were physically abused and three lost their husbands

Their stories are almost unbelievable, yet their pain is clear and for three of them, their sins are abundant.

Yet, here they are recorded in the bloodline of Jesus.

TAMAR – not in this morning’s reading from Matthew 1, but cited in the opening verses Joan read last Sunday – vs. 3

Tamar’s story is a sordid tale of grief and depravity. Her story is not usually included in a church school curriculum so you may never have heard of her. Let me briefly outline her story here:

She was the daughter in law of a man named Judah.

Judah had three sons – Er, Onan, and Shelah.

Tamar married the eldest son, Er, but this man was wicked **in the Lord’s sign and so the Lord put him to death [Genesis 38:7]**

In that culture and time it was customary for a woman to marry the brother of her deceased husband in order to be provided for and remain a part of the family.

So father Judah married off daughter in law, Tamar to his second son, Onan.

Onan was not much better than his older brother in terms of abuse and wickedness and so he too is put to death by God.

At this point, Judah lies to Tamar, promising that she will be taken care of until Judah’s youngest son is older and ready for marriage.

But Judah has no intention of fulfilling that promise.

So here is Tamar – suffered abuse under 2 wicked husbands and a father in law she does not trust.

Abandonment is a real fear: for widows, even abused ones, do not fare well in that culture
This leads Tamar to resort to some very questionable actions

She dresses up as a prostitute and tricks her now widowed father in law into sleeping with her.

Tamar becomes pregnant with Judah's child.

She could have been expelled from the household or burned,

But when Judah discovers who the “prostitute” really is, Judah proclaims safety and care for Tamar. He knows that it is his lack of good faith in the promise to Tamar that has driven her to take the action she has.

She is more right than I says Judah

That's the story of the first woman included in Jesus family tree.

RAHAB – vs 5.

Her story is recounted in the Old Testament book of Joshua.

It is a good story!

Rahab had nothing to gain from helping the spies.

Yet she, out of all the people of Jericho was the one to protect them and to trust in their God's strength.

**The LORD your God is indeed God in heaven
above and on earth below. [Joshua 2:11b]**

That is a confession of faith if ever there was one. Owing to that faith of Rahab and display of heroism Rahab too is part of the lineage of Jesus.

RUTH— again cited last week (vs. 5). In just 4 chapters the author of Ruth's story gives to us one of the most romantically beautiful stories in all of scripture.

Ruth, a foreigner, is a model of self-sacrifice and service.

Witness her commitment to her now widowed mother in law Naomi

**“Do not press me to leave you
or to turn back from following you!**

**Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people,
and your God my God.**

**¹⁷Where you die, I will die—
there will I be buried.**

**May the LORD do thus and so to me,
and more as well,
if even death parts me from you!” (Ruth 1:16-17)**

What a display of service to others

Owing to such faithfulness to Naomi and to return as a foreigner to Jerusalem,

Ruth is ultimately blessed with a husband named Boaz (and together they had a child named Obed, whose son was Jesse – the father of King David.

So King David has a Moabite great-grandmother!

Ruth could not have known or even imagined that by following Naomi, she would someday be blessed by being part of Jesus – the Messiah's family tree
BATHSHEBA – vs. 6 – listed only as the wife of Uriah.

This is another sordid tale in the Bible involving King David, Bathsheba's first husband, Uriah and Bathsheba.

It is a tale of murder, misuse of power, adultery and the death of an innocent.

Bathsheba's subsequent griefs – loss of her husband, loss of her first child are retold to every generation who reads her story.

MARY – vs. 16 – the next section of the family tree of Jesus.

A virgin girl chosen to be the mother of the Saviour of the world.

An incredible story – promised in marriage to Joseph, an angel of the Lord, Gabriel, tells her she will become the mother of the Messiah.

An ordinary girl, who likely planned to live an ordinary life.

Yet, when push to comes to shove as it were, Mary's response is an indication of the depth of her faith in God

³⁸ "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.[Luke 1:38]

Remarkable!

Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba and Mary – the ladies of the Jesus' family tree.

Why? Why has Matthew taken this bold step in including women, let alone THESE women to the family tree of Jesus?

Each of these women is broken in some way, with broken stories

That's an important truth to highlight – *just as there are no perfect people in scripture – save one – Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour – there are no perfect people who are followers of Jesus today.*

All of us do or think actions and behaviors that drive wedges in our relationship with God, with others and within ourselves – upset our peace of mind.

We are sinners.

Our sins may not be the sins of the "ladies" mentioned, but we still sin.

The wedges in our relationships with God, others and ourselves are still present.

*But with Jesus Christ, and trusting in him, we can live as forgiven people,
Made right with God people owing to God's action for us in his Son Jesus Christ.*

How does St. Paul phrase it in his Roman Letter?

Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me...?

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

(Roms 7:24-25)

The stories also remind us *that quite ordinary people are able to do and accomplish extraordinary things not by their own strength and power, but by God's.*

That is a really important touch point for us.

Life is difficult

How do any of us get through the griefs, the disappointments, the unplanned, and the curve balls thrown at us as well as maintaining balance and humility when the good times roll in?

The ladies remind us in the context of their own stories that it is the Lord, who is their guide,
It is the Lord upon whom we can and must depend.

How does the angel Gabriel phrase it in his announcement to Mary **-for nothing will be impossible with God.**

Today, each one of us is called to worship,

To entrust our lives to the God with **whom nothing is impossible,**

And in God's eyes, there are "no ordinary people".

None of the 5 ladies saw themselves as special – quite the opposite really.

Yet it is by their “ordinariness” that God could turn ordinary into spectacular people of great and deep faith in Him

People who were prepared to put their lives, their futures on the line,

Because they held to the promises of God

They came to see – often by faith – that God’s promises were true and eternal.

Their faith and actions are in so many ways forerunners of Jesus’ own ministry – self-sacrifice for others – Ruth

Hope – Mary, and Rahab

I look at the stories of the 5 women and see 5 people who were scared, wrestled with doubt as to whether they would ever be accepted by God, with low self-esteem and self-worth.

Lies they have been told,

Hurts that they have experienced and are convinced that they are unloved, unusable and unwanted.

Rahab--There is nothing noble about prostitution.

Tamar – nothing noble in what she found herself forced to do.

Bathsheba – only one word for her – victim.

These are particularly nasty stories – and sadly still happening with the names changed to protect not just the guilty but the innocent.

However, what the ladies' stories remind us is that God never stops loving any of us

We can be used by God no matter what we have done

And we are important to the working out of God's Kingdom no matter how useless we are told we are or we believe ourselves to be,

God is able to use any of us,

To call any of us to move, to do incredible things for his glory.

God does this all despite our past, despite our sin and despite our doubts!

Listen,

Our stories might seem unlikely or insignificant

Maybe there are even things in our pasts that we would rather hide than bring into the light,

But as we see in Matthew 1 – the writer is not afraid to share stories of Jesus' family tree – even when those stories that are messy, scandalous and uncomfortable.

Bring on the ladies in Jesus' family tree?

Absolutely!!

For here are 5 ladies who were unlikely in every sense of that word.

And yet they are heroes of the faith

Why? Because each of them takes surprising steps of faith that play a part in Jesus – God’s Son – taking human form.

I wonder...how might God use unlikely circumstances in your life,
My life, our lives to bring about his plans and purpose? ...
AMEN