

First Presbyterian Church  
Bozeman, Montana  
Dan Krebill, co-pastor

January 20, 2019  
*2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time*  
Matthew 1:1-17

### **Rooted and Grounded in Love**

A good story when well told can contain multiple layers of meaning. The meaning gleaned from a story is determined by a number of factors. The meaning of a story has to do with who is telling the story. It has to do with who is hearing the story. It has to do with when the story is told and heard. Its meaning has to do with how the story is told. And it has to do with why the story is told. And with the passage of time, some of these factors can change and evolve.

That's why I wanted to start this new year with the first chapter of the first book in the New Testament—the Gospel of Matthew. By *new year* I mean now that we have come through the Advent and Christmas focus of our attention in worship. Last Sunday our focus was on the baptism of Jesus which marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

You may have noticed at the top of the bulletin that today is what is called in the annual cycle of worship, "The 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time." A number of years ago, a long-time church member was somewhat baffled, and even a bit offended, when she saw this terminology on the bulletin. In her mind the word, "ordinary," was synonymous with dull, or mundane or even mediocre. And none of those terms were appropriate in describing what we do in worship on such a Sunday marked ordinary. If indeed that's what ordinary means, I certainly would have agreed. However, what is meant by ordinary is more along the lines of regular, or common or usual. In the course of the year, there are two periods of time called ordinary. The first is the time between the baptism of Jesus and Ash Wednesday when we begin the 6 weeks of Lent leading up to Easter. The second, and longer of the two ordinary periods, is the time between Pentecost—that day 50 days after Easter—and the beginning of Advent that leads to Christmas. The ordinary time periods are those between the *extraordinary* periods in which our attention is on the events surrounding Jesus' birth and the events surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection.

Today then marks the beginning of the first of those two ordinary periods of time when we are in our more regular or common time. And again, that's why I thought it appropriate to start at the beginning.

As many of you know, Matthew is one of 4 books in the Bible that are called gospels. A gospel is an account or testimony, in this case, to Jesus and the truth or good news of his being the messiah or promised one from God. While the 4 gospels covers a lot of similar material, each of them does it from a particular starting point and perspective. None of the 4 gospels begins in the same way.

As we heard just a bit ago, Matthew begins this way: "An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, . . ." The next 15 verses then are a recital of names of the ancestors in Jesus' family that lead back to King David, and then all the way back to Abraham himself. Matthew summarizes this list in three sets of 14 generations that total 42 in all. "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." (Mt. 1:17)

To the casual reader today, this long list of names, some of which are hard to pronounce, seems like a part of the gospel to just skip over to get to the good stuff. Oh there might be a familiar name or two among the dozens mentioned. But isn't the point of this list to simply verify that Jesus has a history

grounded in the history of the world? Well, yes, but to his Jewish listeners and readers, this list of names would have packed more of a punch than that.

There are two things about this genealogy that would have stood out loud and clear at the time it was written. And there are two things about it that would have been somewhat surprising and perhaps even puzzling.

The first of the two loud and clear messages in this genealogy is the absolute establishment of Jesus' credentials as a legitimate king. By tying him directly to King David—the undisputed greatest king in the history of Israel—Matthew is making it crystal clear that Jesus is the one who was promised by God, that descendant of King David who would come and rule God's people. Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecies pointing to this coming messiah. And Matthew wastes no time in pursuing this theme in the second chapter story of the visit of the wise men from the east who come seeking to discover where it is that the "King of the Jews" has been born.

The other patriarch to whom Matthew's genealogy directly ties Jesus is the patriarch of them all—Abraham himself. This fully seals Jesus' Jewish credentials, assuring his listeners and readers that Jesus is the real deal. There would be no question that he is fully part of the chosen people of God that we read about throughout the Hebrew scriptures—the Old Testament.

On these two matters, his fully Jewish heritage as well as his rightful claim as heir to the throne of King David were essential for the Jewish community to which Matthew's gospel is addressed. Hearing of these two essential connections, they would have been all ears then to soak up what Matthew would have to say in the rest of his gospel.

But there are two other things about this long list of names that would have caught the attention of Matthew's audience. And these two, would not have been deemed essential at all, but nevertheless surprising and even a bit puzzling.

The first is that among the 42 generations mentioned, there are four women who are named or referenced. Over three dozen men are mentioned, and there are four women as well. This would have been highly unusual in the patriarchal culture in which Christianity arose. By mentioning these specific women, Matthew is attributing to them a much higher value than would normally have been accorded women of his day. Including these women in the history of Jesus' lineage, is a subtle and yet significant message that this messiah who is the fulfillment of God's promises, is going to be so much more than what was expected.

And then the other really surprising thing that comes through in mentioning these women is that they're not just female/feminine names appearing in the lineup. Some of these women were not even Jewish and even more surprising some were known sinners. By the way, in the interest of full disclosure, the list of men includes some known sinners as well. How can this be that the lineage of Jesus includes Gentiles (that is non-Jews) and sinners as well? The inclusion of these women was a very notable precursor to what was coming in God's gift of Jesus.

So there are the two big things: Jesus' indisputable Jewish lineage, and his being a rightful heir to the throne. And there are the other two more subtle and surprising things: Jesus' family tree includes Gentiles, and sinners. There is yet one more notable thing to observe that perhaps stands out to us today more than it would have stood out in the first century.

In Matthew's gospel the lineage of Jesus is traced back through his earthly father, Joseph. Well, of course, in a patriarchal culture, lineage through the father is the norm. But doesn't this seem to be in conflict with the virgin birth narrative, where Mary becomes pregnant, not by Joseph, her betrothed, but rather miraculously by the power of the Holy Spirit? From our modern scientific perspective and holding to the virgin birth understanding, if Jesus had taken a cheek swab and sent it in to 23andMe, there would have been no genetic connection to Joseph when the results were returned. And yet, Matthew traces Jesus' genealogy through Joseph.

My friends, amazing good news is jam-packed into these first 17 verses of this first gospel. The good news is that God has fulfilled the promise of a messiah who is not only a fully descended Jew but who is also a rightful heir to the throne of the King of the Jews. This good news is so good that it is also becoming clear that this good news is not as narrowly conscribed as had been anticipated. It would seem that this promised messiah, Jesus, has connections with Gentiles, sinners, and those who are even beyond the genetically connected. In other words, Matthew is saying in a very creative way that before he says anything else about Jesus, let there be no doubt that Jesus is the messiah, the savior for the whole created order—that's everyone!

This message of inclusion in the fullest sense of the word is a wonderful message for us in our day when we as a nation continue to struggle to ensure that all are included. On this Martin Luther King, Jr. weekend, when our nation pauses to remember his legacy, we're grateful that we have a heritage in our faith that emboldens us to carry on the work of this man we commemorate.

Now that we're in the middle of January and of winter, we're re-engaging our year-long emphasis on what we've put in the phrase, "Learning and Living God's Love, Together." This theme has been so engaging since we launched it last September. This dynamic emphasis has us on the move, on the way, as we learn more and more about the amazing love that God showers down on us, and as we then live and move and act as a result of that love so as to share it with others.

And it's the last word in that phrase that I want to end with today. The word "together" is such an important part of who we are and what we're doing. Those who went before Jesus, in his lineage, those 42 generations, together set the stage for the coming of Jesus. And the more than 60 generations that connect us in our day with Jesus, 2000 years ago, also preserved and cherished the faith that they have passed on to us. All of them, both before Jesus, as well as after Jesus, are rooted and grounded in love.

Those two verses we read from the book of Hebrews say it so well. "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God." (Heb. 12:1-2)