Springfield Presbyterian Church

November 27th, 2022

There’s Room for Every Story

1. Genealogies

I had to laugh when I read commentator, Merryl Blair’s

description of the Matthew reading as, “about as exciting as reading the phonebook.” You probably heard it in my breath – it’s a haul to get through those names, many names we may not recognize and that may be foreign to us. We might turn to one another and ask, perhaps quite fairly, “Why is this the first thing that Matthew wants to share with us as readers?”

 Matthew knows his audience – these are folks who have an Old Testament kind of understanding of genealogy. In the ancient world, you needed to know who your family was because there was no law enforcement or the like, so your family provided an important safety net. The further you could list back your family, the wider the net you could call into action.[[1]](#footnote-1) It also gave you a legitimacy – you weren’t some random foreigner, but rather, you were part of this larger network of some known names and that might have saved your life in those days.

1. Genealogy Today

At first glance in this reading, I thought – well, we are far from

the ancient world today, I guess that’s why we usually try to skip over this part of hard to pronounce names. Yet, if we allow the Scripture to speak, we may find that it evokes some important emotions in us.

 Ancestory.com and DNA tracing have become so important to many. TV shows that trace people’s roots have become popular, especially among celebrities, as they step back into their own history. I have a cousin who goes to genealogy conventions where he learns the newest and best indicators of how to trace your history and my father used to cobble up as much information on our family to trace back on the Family Tree computer program. I have pages upon pages of my family tree, many names that I recognize and many that I do not. We may not write our list of ancestors out in the way that Matthew would have, but I think that each of us values the stories that we have heard of ages past.

 Writer Linda Hogan puts it beautifully, she says, “Walking. I am listening to a deeper way. Suddenly all of my ancestors are behind me. Be still, they say. Watch and listen. You are the result of the love of thousands.” Wow. You, each and every one of you here today, regardless of family trauma or troubles, still sit here as part of a greater story – you, my friends, you are the result of the love of thousands.

1. My own family history

As I read Jesus’ genealogy and thought about the work of my

cousin and father, I started to think about my own history. I am told I am a blood relative of Abraham Lincoln. Somewhere, there is record that I have ancestors who are part of the Choctaw Nation of Alabama and Oklahoma. I am the descendent of a Baptist minister, Obadiah Holmes, who was a bit of a good troublemaker in the early colonies of America. I am also the daughter of men and women and I only know their name, but not their story. Yet, as I look upon this tree, woven over time, it creates a brilliant and beautiful tapestry.

 Dr. Christine Hong says it well, she says, “Names are the seeded hope of one generation planted in another. They are the thread that connects our histories, stories, and futures. We are the hopes of those who’ve come before, and we live in hope for those who will come after us.”

1. Jesus’ lineage

I do have some wonderings this morning though, that I’d like to

share with you. When we hear from Matthew this morning about Jesus’ lineage, we imagine all those same threads being pulled together. Did you notice that this is the genealogy of Joseph? It’s interesting, because you could say, “Well, Joseph isn’t the biological father of Jesus…so is this truly his family?” It’s a good theological question. Yet, we can see that Joseph’s story is certainly part of Jesus’ story and Joseph’s tie to King David provides this legitimacy for Jesus’ call as the Messiah. Joseph, despite his first reasonable and fearful conclusion that Mary was unfaithful, responds to the Spirit by adopting Jesus as his own. That night, at the stable in Bethlehem, there was no question who was sitting next to Mary rocking the baby Jesus to sleep in a cradle. God chose Joseph to be Jesus’ earthly father – what a humbling and powerful responsibility.

 I also wonder, because we don’t hear much about Jesus’ childhood, what Joseph and Mary would have told Jesus’ about his lineage. I could imagine though, based on the fact that Jesus gets in trouble with his parents for sneaking off to the synagogue to teach, that Jesus would become well versed with who his ancestors were. This list would not be foreign to him and perhaps as he grew and learned, he found out that he was not alone, he knew that even as the Son of God, he was part of a greater story than himself.

V. Discovering your own story

 As we begin this adventure of Advent together and as we start our generation-to-generation series, it makes sense that we say that there is room for every story. You see, even as a church family, there are saints that have come before us – Springfield, the community here in this place, was built on the love of many. Each and every one of us bring our stories here to this place, our experiences and our heritage, and young or old, each story is a valuable part of our larger story as a family of faith in Christ.

 So, I have a few questions for you this week. As you think about Christ’s ancestors, go ahead and look up a few of those unknown names. Have a google. Who is this Uzziah? We’ve heard the name Judah, but what’s his story? Boaz – we know there’s a relationship to Ruth but…what else can his story tell us? We might only be able to glean a little bit, depending on the person you choose and how much is written about them, but today is an invitation to look back at all of the people who brought Jesus into the world today.

 The second question I have for you is…what is your story and how do you begin to tell it? Have you written down some of your story for your kids? I will tell you from pastoral experience, that it has been an incredible honor, especially as someone has passed away, to read their stories by their own hand. If you think to yourself today, “But what do I have to say?” I would urge you, regardless of age, to put pen to paper and write part of your story down. It is a gift not only to you, but to those who come after you.

 And the final question, the one that is really the work that we need to do together is, “How do we tell people about the beginning of our church’s story?” When we celebrate All Saint’s Day, we have a great opportunity to name those who have passed on. We also have a chance to rediscover the stories that brought us all here this morning. Ask people at fellowship – ask them about the stories they know from this place and let the stories of Springfield infuse the stories of your own.

 As we begin this series, I pray that from generation to generation, that we are able to share our stories this week as we continue to mark the days ahead as we look forward to Jesus Christ’s birth. Amen.

1. What my grandmother’s taught me, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)