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Matthew 1:1-17; Isaiah 2: 1-5

The Real Christmas Story:

and what does it matter anyway?

There have been a couple of times when I’ve called a QB sneak and decided to read the day’s scripture myself.

And trust me – it’s really only on the times when I think I might be doing all of you a favor by not asking one of you to read it.

This is one of those mornings.

If you have a Bible near you, you may want to read along, just to make sure I don’t miss anything. I’m reading from the Gospel According to Matthew, Chapter 1, verse, 1.

A record of the ancestors of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham:

2Abraham was the father of Isaac.

Isaac was the father of Jacob.

Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers.

3Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah,

whose mother was Tamar.

Perez was the father of Hezron.

Hezron was the father of Aram.

4Aram was the father of Amminadab.

Amminadab was the father of Nahshon.

Nahshon was the father of Salmon.

5Salmon was the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab.

Boaz was the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth.

Obed was the father of Jesse.

6Jesse was the father of David the king.

David was the father of Solomon,

whose mother had been the wife of Uriah.

7Solomon was the father of Rehoboam.

Rehoboam was the father of Abijah.

Abijah was the father of Asaph.

8Asaph was the father of Jehoshaphat.

Jehoshaphat was the father of Joram.

Joram was the father of Uzziah.

9Uzziah was the father of Jotham.

Jotham was the father of Ahaz.

Ahaz was the father of Hezekiah.

10Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh.

Manasseh was the father of Amos.

Amos was the father of Josiah.

11Josiah was the father of Jechoniah and his brothers.

This was at the time of the exile to Babylon.

12After the exile to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel.

Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel.

13Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud.

Abiud was the father of Eliakim.

Eliakim was the father of Azor.

14Azor was the father of Zadok.

Zadok was the father of Achim.

Achim was the father of Eliud.

15Eliud was the father of Eleazar.

Eleazar was the father of Matthan.

Matthan was the father of Jacob.

16Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary—of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Christ.

17So there were fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen generations from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen generations from the exile to Babylon to the Christ.

Whew. Ok. Let us pray.

Holy God – God who is always present and God who often feels not quite here – be with us in our waiting, be with us in our impatience. Help us to find the truths in our pasts, to find your hand in our stories. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all these gathered hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Well, that sounded a whole lot like the Christmas story you know and love, right?

Nothing like a little genealogy to kick off the holiday spirit. Pretty much akin to decorating the Christmas tree.

So, why this? Why is Matthew (or whatever our author’s name was) putting us through this? Perhaps, more importantly, why is Pastor Laura, putting us through this?

What could it possibly matter?

Well, I’m doing it because we’re headed into the year of Matthew in our lectionary. And we’ll be spending a lot of time in this Gospel over the next year. So, I thought it might be good to start off where the author himself, start.

And Matthew? Well, he did it, because he knew his audience.

He knew that his church of Jewish Christians – who most likely recently left or were expelled from the synagogue – needed an identity to ground themselves in.

Needed to know that Jesus Christ, the Messiah, was in fact the descendent of all their Jewish forebearers – of all those men and women whose names bring to mind stories of the faith, each of Matthew’s earlier listeners would’ve been very familiar with.

To us – it mostly sounds like a whole lot of random names.

To early Jewish Christians – it would have sounded like George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, Harriet Tubman and Martin Luther King Jr.

Abraham, Isaac, Ruth, David, Solomon, Bathsheba – these names would have meant something to the early Jewish Christians. These names would’ve brought stories and history immediately to mind.

And they would’ve tied Jesus to a long line of Israelites whose lives have been shaped and molded by God.

Sometimes, especially during Advent, as we prepare for God coming as child, we need the reminder that God is in the past, in our present, and also, in the not yet that is to come.

So, it’s been kind of a good, maybe strange, month in movies for me recently. I’ve seen two: Harriet and Frozen 2.

Very different to be sure. But they share some pretty interesting things in common.

Supposedly the movie Harriet is not completely factual – of course, it was not intended to be a documentary.

But there are some facts in the movie that many who saw it were surprised to learn.

Like the fact that Harriet Tubman was a scout and a spy for the Union Army during the Civil War, leading an armed expedition that freed more that 700 slaves in one raid. Tubman was known throughout the country by the alias Moses – leading some 70 enslaved to freedom via the Underground Railroad and other routes.

She is a hero whose story we should be sharing in all of our history classes for all ages. I don’t think I learned much about Harriet Tubman past the 2nd or 3rd grade.

And then there’s Frozen 2.

The story of Queen Elsa and Princess Anna.

But more specifically in this iteration – the story of the Kingdom of Arendelle and their neighbors to the north, the tribe of Northuldra.

Now, I was warned to not give any spoilers – but I’m about to… so I guess, spoiler alert?

Cause I do actually recommend seeing both of these movies; even if you don’t have a four-year-old niece who’s been singing frozen songs every day for the last two years.

The short and quick version is that if Elsa and Anna want to save Arendelle – they’re going to have to confront the past.

Not just the past, but the actions of their parents, their very own grandfather – who they’ve been told is a hero…

These two women have to be willing to set aside the lies they’ve been told about the past and open their eyes to the truth in order to set things right and save the people and kingdom they love.

Facing the truth of our history in order to set things right.

It’s necessary in order to heal past rifts, reconcile past injustices, and head towards a future that actually resembles God’s kingdom for all people.

And it’s one of the ways we acknowledge that God is in the past, in our present, and in the future yet to come.

Now, I’m not sure Matthew’s genealogy is really about us telling the literal truth about the past.

I mean, it’s literally impossible to have 14 generations span the centuries he’s claiming it does.

Literal truth as we would understand it is not to be found in this first chapter of Matthew.

But that’s not to say that there isn’t theological truth to be found by connecting Jesus to all these Israelites heroes and heroes.

To the first human God made a covenant with – Abraham. To the most famous king of Israel – David. To the woman who changed her own fortunes and with them Israel’s – Ruth. And to the woman who was a victim of rape and survives to become the mother of a king – Bathsheba.

Matthew is telling us a history.

A history with a bias. A history with a slant to be sure.

But take it from a history major: that’s what ALL history is.

And it’s still important to learn.

And it’s important to make sure that our version of history – that comes with its own unique bias, its own blind spots, its own version of the truth – is not the only version we listen to.

In order to get a fuller view of the history that God would have us know – we have to listen to all the stories, all the narratives, all the voices of God’s beloved creation.

The includes the histories told by our Native neighbors.

And African-Americans.

And Japanese-Americans.

And the early white settlers in White Salmon – locals who have been here for generations.

All of their stories – their histories – deserve to be listened to.

And then, I believe once we know how to start listening to one another’s stories, we start to understand our present a bit better.

Perhaps we may begin respecting one another, maybe we start truly caring for each other, and possibly we start to imagine, we start to building, the community God is calling us to.

Friends – we are going to need God in order to realize the call of the prophet Isaiah.

To reach that future in which swords are beat into plowshares – we are going to have to reckon with our histories and reckon with God as we face the continuing injustice that ensnares our present world.

We must tell the beautiful stories and we must tell the really hard stories.

King David assaulted the wife of Uriah – who’s name was Bathsheba. He murdered Uriah and stole his wife – after he raped her.

This is not a good story. And yet… It makes it into Matthew’s genealogy.

Our history is full of people and nations who show amazing courage and strength, but it is also full of the opposite – people and nations driven by greed and lust and power.

I believe reckoning with our history – all of it – the good and the bad is the only way forward into our future with God.

You might ask – what does any of this have to do with Advent? Or Christmas?

Every year – we come to the season of Advent and talk about waiting… and hoping… for Emmanuel – God with us – to be born into the world.

But what if everything we need for that new future, for that God’s filled kingdom, is actually already here?

What if what we’re waiting for this Advent season is something that’s already all around us?

Waiting…

Whispering…

Moving through the cracks in our armor, unexpectedly touching our hearts and opening our eyes…

Helping us tell our stories…

What if God’s been here this whole time?

Waiting for us to wake up and start living like we’ve actually witnessed a little bit of heaven and we believe it’s possible to find more of it?

I believe God is all around us. In the best parts of our histories and the worst – present for it all.

God is waiting for us to come awake to all that has happened and all that is yet to come.

Church – let us wake up! And find the God that has come, that is, and that is yet to be!

Amen.