

Nurtured
Preacher: Rev. Reebee Girash
Date: December 8, 2019

16:21

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A Sermon for Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC
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Leader: God did not wait till the world was ready, till the nations were at peace.

People: God came when the heavens were unsteady, and prisoners cried out for release.

Leader: God did not wait for the perfect time. God came when the need was deep and great.

People: God dined with sinners in all their grime, turned water into wine. God did not wait till hearts were pure.

Leader: In joy God came to a tarnished world of sin and doubt.

People: To a world like ours of anguished shame God came, and God's light would not go out.

Leader: God came to a world which did not mesh, to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.

People: In the mystery of Word made Flesh the Maker of the stars was born.

Leader: We cannot wait till the world is sane to raise our songs with joyful voice, for to share our grief, to touch our pain,

People: God came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!

Texts:

Isaiah 11:1-10; Matthew 1:1-6; 17

The Peaceful Kingdom

11A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

2 The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

3 His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;

4 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

5 Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

6 The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.

7 The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

9 They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.

Return of the Remnant of Israel and Judah

10 On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

Matthew 1: 1-6a; 17

1 An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

2 Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, 3 and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram, 4 and Aram the father of Aminadab, and Aminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, 5 and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, 6 and Jesse the father of King David.

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

17 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.

Prayer

Sermon

I had the world's most devoted, kindest and most deeply faithful parents. This is merely a statement of fact, confirmed by historic evidence. I am not saying you did not also have the world's greatest parents - perhaps our parents are tied, I am willing to imagine that possibility. Perhaps some of you here are the world's current kindest and most deeply faithful parents. I could believe it. And of course we know Jesus had the world's greatest, most devoted, kindest and most deeply faithful human parents, also.

Many of you also know that my parents were not my biological parents, they were my parents through the gift of adoption. Because of this, and because of some other interesting twists and turns in prior generations, my family tree is complicated. People in my extended family trip over their tongues every time they try to understand where I sit, generationally. Age-wise, I should be the child of Baby Boomers, but in reality I was brought up by Greatest Generation folks. I have a sister whom I'm very close with, with whom I only lived for six months growing up. My family background could make for a great novel, though no one would believe it. Ancestry.com crashes when I input my info. I watch commercials for DNA services that claim to tell you just which country in which continent "you come from" and I find I have zero interest whatsoever in paying to have my genes mapped because other than medical background, that kind of report would tell me very little about who I come from. Some folks assume that biological relationships supplant nurturing relationships where I believe just the opposite.

So it is with some cognitive dissonance that I come to the two passages we have before us today. Viewed one way, they are stories of genealogy, ancestry.com for a non-digital moment in

history. Viewed another way, they are stories of nurture and heritage, and this is the way I'd like to spend our time with them today. They show how Jesus was nurtured in faith.

Jesus, it turns out, also had a complex family tree!

Matthew and Luke have two different genealogies for Jesus, each of which is more theological than historical. Matthew's sets "the story of Jesus into the context of the ongoing story of God's acts in history." (New Interpreters Bible, Matthew). The sets of 14 generations are common for how Jewish families would tell their family history. Matthew finds it very important to connect Jesus to the line of David, to that passage from Isaiah about a new branch from the line of Jesse (David's father). "Matthew is true to his Jewish faith in affirming God who will not let go of creation..." (New Interpreters Bible, Matthew, p. 132)

In connecting Jesus to his Jewish roots and ancestors, I want to be careful not to fall into the trap of seeing supersessionism here. Matthew was a faithful Jew, following a faithful Jew whose ministry was connected deeply to Judaism and was not meant to supersede it. Indeed for Matthew, Jesus was an echo of Moses and David. As Jewish scholar Amy Jill Levine says, "Matthew quotes Torah and the Prophets over and over to show Jesus' continuity with them."

Matthew's genealogy also makes another important point: the several women included in it also happen to be Gentiles, and their life stories are unusual. Ruth, for example, had married into the Jewish faith and stayed with her Israelite mother-in-law even when they were both widowed, showing loyalty, courage and faithfulness that we still emulate today. Matthew is saying, God's purpose is to include all kinds of people and people of all nations.

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Abraham and Jacob, Ruth and Boaz....I wonder if these were the family stories that Mary told young Jesus at bedtime, do you know, little one, how brave your great great great great grandmother Ruth was? Do you know how faithful Abraham was, how much God loved him and his family, how much God loves you? Do you know, little one, how far Jacob walked? Remember his journey when you are on yours.

Obed and Jesse and David...I wonder if these were the family stories that Joseph told their little boy as he helped in the carpenter's woodshop. You were born in a place of kings. Your great great great great grandfather wrote songs. Do you know, little one, the dreams that I had about you, before you were even born? Do you know, to learn to be a peacemaker you have only to ponder Isaiah's words,

6 The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them. (Isaiah 11)

Do you know, little one, you will be part of this story?

I imagine Mary and Joseph told him the story of his very complicated family tree;
Told him what mattered were the ones who nurtured the ones who nurtured the ones who nurtured him.
Taught him the stories of his faith.
Guided him to be nurtured by the Spirit of God....
Raised him up, rooted in their faith, to be new branch growing from ancient tree.

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Perhaps it is our call today, to guide a new generation, rooted in faith and guided toward the spirit of God.

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I stood under a crowded bus shelter, waiting in the cold for a long delayed ride home, with people of all ages. A young woman approached our group and began to make a well rehearsed announcement. Ladies and gentlemen, I'm sorry to interrupt your conversations, but I am hoping someone can spare a few dollars, it would help me get a hot meal tonight, could any of you nice people help me? Most of us nice people recognized her, had heard her same plea before. The headphones went back into our ears, our eyes went back down to our knees. But I watched as a girl, maybe nine, unzipped her pink sequined unicorn backpack and reached inside. She looked up at the older man holding her hand, and pointed to what she had pulled from her backpack. He paused - then smiled and nodded his head, yes. The girl gave her dollar to the young woman with a shy smile. I was watching a child whose generosity had been nurtured. Whose kindness had been encouraged.

This morning we enacted a joyful tradition here at Pilgrim, the Mitten Tree tradition. We brought gloves and hats, scarves and mittens, warm and new and handmade gifts forward. Our efforts and the gifts of our Mission Committee on our behalf will make sure that participants at East End House will stay warm this winter. But every year that we enact this joyful tradition we do something else, something just as important. We nurture our children's generosity. We invite them to recognize the needs of neighbors beyond their neighborhood. We give them an opportunity to participate in a small but meaningful act of altruism. We root them in a faith tradition grounded in loving God and loving our neighbors.

And on Friday, Zac and I walked with a thousand teenagers and their allies, calling for climate justice at the state house, a group who had clearly been nurtured in courage and justice.

And we are all part of nurturing this next generation, these little children who will lead us. No matter how complex our family tree, even if the family tree is down to a stump, we feed a strong new branch, teach courage and kindness, invite the spirit of the Lord
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the awe of the Lord. (Isaiah 11)

For Isaiah's community in exile, the future looked bleak but Isaiah knew God was at work. We know God is at work. This Advent season, we are not just about remembering Jesus' birth - we are looking forward to a world renewed. To say it like Walter Brueggemann, "In that great day, the rules of life will be changed, bent in the direction of gentleness and peace, not just any peace, but shalom. "Shalom is creation time, when all God's creation eases up on hostility and destruction and finds another way of relating."

We may not be raising a Messiah (seriously, let's check in if you think you're raising the next Messiah) but we are nurturing young people who will follow the Prince of Peace, who will experience the presence of Emmanuel, who will trace their family tree to a teacher whose message was love and inclusion, justice and generosity, peace and joy, who came and will come to build up God's reign of peace. And the more peacemakers we nurture, the more peace our world will know.
Amen.