

Sunday, October 6, 2019
New Good News
Pastor Craig

There was a church who called a new Pastor. Shortly after the Pastor arrived, members began inviting the Pastor to join them in different activities. However, the Pastor was warned that the most powerful group were a group of men in the choir who liked to go fishing. So he asked if he could join them Saturday morning. Saturday at 3:30am, he was at the lake as they took the boat out to the middle. Suddenly he realized he had brought no bait, and had to borrow worms from the others. After three hours, each brought out their breakfast and thermos of coffee; but the Pastor had brought none. By noon, the pastor had caught nothing, was tired and hungry, and no one had said a word to him all morning. The Pastor got out of the boat and walked on water to the shore where he drove home. The next day at church, people asked how it had been fishing with the new pastor. They replied, "He is no gardener because he found no worms, He can't fish, He cannot cook, and He clearly cannot swim either."

When a new Head of Staff arrives there are two different models for how to begin. Fire all the staff, tell the choir to sit down front, rope off unused pews, change everything to how you think it should be, change the time of worship, restructure all the committees, force everyone do what you want. OR abandon all integrity to fit in even if it is broken, making no changes, no matter what. But thankfully there is another alternative: Recognize what works well, staff and leaders who do a wonderful job, share ideas, and recognize that where they succeed you succeed, where they fail, you fail, so help one another to succeed. Making incremental changes slowly together to build trust.

This summer, controversy arose in the NY Times over which History we tell. That, Columbus claimed America in 1492, or that he captured persons as slaves, calling them Indians? That Pilgrims came to a New World for Religious Freedom in 1620, or that Blacks were brought here as slaves beginning in 1619? Reconciliation is never automatic, but this is also not new. One means, is retelling our story as Genealogy, instead of simply reciting History.

37 years after the Resurrection, a cataclysmic event took place, like September 11th. The Roman Legion destroyed the City of Jerusalem, and with the City, the Temple. The dilemma being Why we Worship? Judaism emphasized God was God, and we are sinners. The only means to rectify sin, to get right with God, was to atone for what was done with the sacrifice of a living thing. The right place for sacrifice was on the Altar, in the Holy of Holies, in the Temple, at Jerusalem, performed by a High Priest. Now, if there is no longer a Priesthood, no longer a City of David, no longer a Temple, no longer an Altar, you NEVER AGAIN could make a sacrificial offering to atone for your sins, you are cut off from God, unable to ever be forgiven!

The Gospels provide the Good News, that while our paying atonement for our sins could no longer happen; God already made that sacrifice for us through a savior, Jesus; who was sacrificed on the Altar of the Cross for our Sin, and the proof of Forgiveness is his Resurrection. The great Wonder is that the Symbol of Domination, Death, Fear = the Cross, became our Hope. Destruction of the Temple, forced us to change to consider faith in the power of forgiveness.

Matthew's purpose here is not simply to identify that Jesus existed, but to demonstrate through the Genealogy of Israel that Jesus is the fulfillment of all that had been prophesied. This Gospel is not only GOOD NEWS, Jesus is NEW GOOD NEWS that we have always known without previously recognizing.

Prior to Judaism, there were Cave Paintings and Hieroglyphics. There was Sanskrit and Cuneiform, but Hebrew is one of the first languages to have a standardized written alphabet. In addition to being able to write their narrative history, they were able to develop and pass along poetry and songs. But also, the Hebrew people had a sense of humor and whimsy, they loved Games, Mysteries, and Wordplays like Crossword puzzles and Acrostics. Because of this, I think one of the most important Faith Questions we need to ask of the Text is "What did you hear, what did you see, what jumped out to attract your curiosity? What Norman Vincent Peale or Billy Graham said, may be intellectual, but what you believe is what matters to you!

Matthew identifies the genealogy coincident with the major events in Israel's story, stating that it took 14 generations to go from Abraham to David. From the Call of a people to faith and trust searching for a land, until their claiming of that land and developing a great Monarchy. And there are! From King David until Deportation to Babylon: 14 generations. And there are! And for Reconciliation, from the Deportation to Babylon until the coming of the Messiah MATTHEW SAYS took 14 generations... but there are not!!! Joseph was the 12th, Jesus the 13th. Why would the author call attention to this, and it be unfulfilled? Who is the 14th generation? Is this Dan Brown's Di Vinci Code?

Instead, we who claim the Good News are the 14th generation. This is our story!

An oddity of this genealogy is that they included the names and identities of women! Thousands of years before knowledge of the Y Chromosome in DNA, this Genealogy recognized the 3 Promises to Abraham: inheritance of Land and Name and Identity, which in Judaism came through Males. SO why include women at all?

Among the first is Tamar. Like many couples, she and her husband were unable to conceive, but different from Sarah and Rebekah, it was clear her husband had been the one unable. The book of Leviticus has a Law, which is strange to us. If a man dies, his next nearest relative has responsibility to take the wife into his house as his wife. The second brother claims her, but refuses to act as husband, and he dies. Judah was unwilling to give her to any of his other sons, so Tamar dressed up as a prostitute and went to receive conception from her father-in-law, by Incest and Prostitution. The scandal being, which is worse, for a woman to act a prostitute in order to conceive a new generation, or for a man to go to prostitutes?

The second is Rahab. When the Hebrews came to the Canaanite City of Jericho, Joshua first sent spies into the city, who were found out, and the Spies were saved by a Canaanite, Prostitute, named Rahab who rescued them.

Ruth, we remember was a Moabite, an Alien, who after drought caused this family to go to Moab, returned with her mother-in-law Naomi, and was claimed by Boaz to become the grandfather of David.

David, who was the best-loved King of Israel, sinned by taking as wife Bathsheba, who was the wife of Uriah and murdering him. As scandalous as this is, Matthew's Genealogy seems to suggest that in response to all the sins of history: incest, prostitution, lying, intermarriage, adultery and murder; The Absolution of our Sin, bringing us into right relation with God comes as one of us, Jesus.

But with inclusion of all these women, who were not free from scandal, what woman is not? The Virgin Mary, is not in the lineage from David, because she is in the Priestly lineage from Moses, Miriam & Aaron, not The Kingly of David

When considering Genealogy, I recognize I idolized my father. He was my role-model, and confidant, colleague and friend. When my father died, suddenly we received a letter from a man claiming to be our illegitimate brother. My initial response was rejection, No way! This was a man of integrity, never would he do this. I was at his bedside for three nights before he died and never did he even hint this. But then I took one of those Genealogy DNA tests, and you cannot argue with reality. So we have had to reframe, and retell our story, and our identity. No longer am I the third of four sons, I am now the 3rd of 5. Communion deals with reconciling new identities and new realities out of past brokenness.