

If you have gone to the movies in the last 25 years, there is assumption we are becoming a Dystopia. Politically there are those arguing between our being a Democracy ruled by Constitution and Law, versus those seeking a Strong Man. We describe these United States of America as being Judeo-Christian, insofar as our Nation's Settlers came to this land searching for religious freedoms. Not as Conquerors. Not as Barbarians. Not for Economic profit. Not on behalf of a Monarchy. Our BIBLE, both First and Second Testaments has a decidedly different understanding of the WORLD of our ALL CREATION. We were/are to be a THEOCRACY. Our earliest ancestors believed that before anything else, there was and Is GOD. We were formed and created by GOD to be in relationship to GOD. The same GOD who is known to us throughout all time and place as CREATOR, SAVIOR and SUSTENANCE of all we hold dear.

Throughout the year, throughout all of the years of our lives, we are remolded by experience, by wars and issues, deaths and depressions, and desires for control. ADVENT refers to what is coming. At ADVENT we let go all that has happened in our past, looking ahead to OUR MESSIAH coming into the World. GOD and Humanity finally becoming ONE: EMMANUEL!

Searching for a beginning point for ADVENT, I invite us to begin with the Prophets; and the first verses of our Bible's first Gospel: Matthew, who through that Judeo-Christian Genealogy connects the origins of FAITH in Genesis: From the Covenant with ABRAHAM, ISAAC, JACOB; to the height of Jerusalem with DAVID & SOLOMON; to destruction at the DEPORTATION to BABYLON and to the birth of JESUS the Christ for us.

Much of ADVENT is taken from the Book of Isaiah. In Scripture and Music. Isaiah is a different prophet. While many prophets were like Nathan, Elijah & Elisha: the mouthpiece of GOD holding Kings accountable; and others, like Jeremiah, Amos and Micah, calling believers to Righteousness, Justice and Mercy. Isaiah was High Priest at Solomon's Temple at Jerusalem, who at the funeral of the King had seen a vision of GOD's TEMPLE. Isaiah was a priest throughout the destruction of the Temple, witnessing everything about their culture, their world, economy and their faith in GOD, destroyed year after year.

Part of me wishes I could preach like Isaiah:

"BEHOLD, The LORD is going to lay waste to the Earth. The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and is made a devastation, The Earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the Laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting Covenant with GOD. Therefore a curse consumes the Earth; the people must bear their guilt."

"Prepare ye the way of the LORD! Make straight a highway for your GOD! Every low place and valley shall be lifted up, every mountaintop be brought low." or "Comfort, comfort my people, says your GOD! Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that hard service has been completed, her sin has been ransomed by the LORD." The people did not listen to Isaiah, I wonder who would listen and how we would respond?

TODAY's passage has the Prophet Isaiah, Son of Man sent by GOD, prophesying to GOD, demanding that the world is a mess and GOD should enter in to fix it! ISAIAH 64: 1-4.

Oh, that You would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before YOU! As when fire sets twigs to blaze causing water to boil. Come down and make your name known to your enemies, cause the nations to quake before you! Since ancient times, no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any GOD other than You, who always acts on behalf of those who trust in GOD.

When abruptly ISAIAH stops and changes his tone from DEMANDING to ACCUSATORY in Verses 5-7.

You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways. But when we continue to sin, you are angry! How then can we be saved? All of us have become unclean, all our acts are

like filthy rags. We, all of us, shrivel up like a leaf, and like a wind our sins sweep us away. No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, as we have wasted away because of our sins.

Then as is often true when we accuse others, the accusation comes back upon us in verses 8 and 9.

Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter. We are all the work of your hand. Do not be angry beyond measure, O LORD, do not remember our sins forever. O Look upon us, we pray, for we are your people.

According to history, after the destruction of Israel by Assyria, then Judah by Babylon, then Babylon by Persia, the Greeks, The Egyptians, the Medes, the Romans, the 2<sup>nd</sup> building of the Temple was destroyed by the ROMAN EMPIRE, which inspired the writing down of Mark as the First Gospel, that JESUS' SACRIFICE had replaced need for TEMPLE SACRIFICE. Matthew writing about a dozen years later, authored the GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW to a Church who had been Jewish and were becoming Christian, SO began not at the beginning of the World, or the beginning of Humanity, but at the beginning of FAITH, of this THEOCRACY, GOD's RELATIONSHIP with HUMANITY; explaining how the MESSIAH: JESUS shares all of our experience, as victims of the DEPORTATION, how he is the SON of DAVID, and SON of ABRAHAM.

There is nothing in this Genealogy not in GENESIS, EXODUS, DEUTERONOMY, JUDGES, SAMUEL and KINGS. This is the Genealogy not only of ABRAHAM to KING DAVID to the DEPORTATION to JESUS; this is Record of GOD's relationship with this people. While the stories have always been known, what is UNIQUE is the inclusion of WOMEN in the Genealogy which typically in a Patriarchal Culture was only Father to Son. These are not Queens, Princesses or Priestesses. The HONEST CANDOR of the GOSPEL, is that each of the women named are connected with EMBARRASSING SCANDALS in the history of Israel, pointing up that all of our Human History is filled with EMBARRASSING SCANDALS rather than successes.

Do you remember TAMAR? Judah, the Great-Grandson of Abraham, Ancestor of the Remnant Tribe, had a son who married TAMAR and the son died. Jewish LAW required that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Son then take the widow as his wife, AND he then died! The Father, Judah was afraid of her marrying his remaining youngest son, so neglected and forgot her. Therefore, TAMAR dressed as a Prostitute and went to what we might call THE RED LIGHT DISTRICT. Who should visit the Prostitutes, but Father Judah, causing TAMAR to become pregnant. Yet, when her pregnancy becomes known and the community of faith want to stone her for her infidelity, TAMAR revealed that JUDAH was as guilty as she for he was the father of her child!

Salmon was the Father of BOAZ by RAHAB. Who was RAHAB? When Joshua led the Hebrews into the Promised Land at the City of Jericho, Joshua sent spies to discover Jericho's strengths and weaknesses, but the spies were found out, and only survived because a Canaanite Prostitute hid them on her roof, then let them down over the walls of the City, the same walls which later came tumbling down. That CANAANITE PROSTITUTE who saved the Israelites was RAHAB who became the mother of BOAZ.

And we recall the name BOAZ, who was the father of OBED by RUTH. RUTH was of the Canaanite Tribe of MOAB. When Bethlehem (The City of Bread) had a terrible Famine, Naomi, her husband Elimelech and their sons sought refuge in MOAB, where all of the men died. When Naomi and her daughter-in-law returned to Bethlehem, RUTH the foreigner, by her hard work and willingness to do whatever it took to provide for the two of them saved them. While we have no word for translating the name RUTH, we know her by what is opposite RUTH: RUTHLESS.

KING DAVID, the Best-Loved King of Israel, the One whom GOD loved, committed Adultery and had the husband Uriah killed, then took BATHSHEBA the Wife of URIAH as his wife.

But there are two other curiosities here.

First, the AUTHOR notes that there were exactly 14 Generations from Abraham to David, and there are! There were 14 Generations from David until the Babylonian Exile, and there were!

Finally that there were 14 Generations from Babylon to JESUS... But there are only 13 through JESUS? Therefore, who are the 14<sup>th</sup> Generation of this Genealogy from Abraham, to David, to Babylon to Jesus, as Inheritors of the GOSPEL WE ARE! We need to see ourselves in this Gospel!

FINALLY, in verse 16, this Genealogy meticulously documents the generations down through a 2<sup>nd</sup> JACOB who was the FATHER OF JOSEPH, reminding us of JACOB the Grandson of ABRAHAM, whose beloved son was JOSEPH the DREAMER who rescued ISRAEL & EGYPT from FAMINE. But if the Genealogy comes down through JOSEPH, what about the Woman, the VIRGIN-BIRTH of MARY? That is not part of MATTHEW's Gospel. LUKE records MARY as in the Lineage of MOSES' Brother AARON, in order that JESUS the MESSIAH was in the lineage of PROPHET and PRIEST and KING.

ADVENT is not a Season to reflect upon our accomplishments, to write a CHRISTMAS LETTER of all we did this year. ADVENT is a SEASON to reflect on all GOD has done in relationship to US, including in our most embarrassing Scandals to have made us who we are.