

"WHAT IS YOUR NAME?"
Mother's Day, May 13, 2018
Matthew 1:1-17

The family tree of Jesus Christ, David's son, Abraham's son:

Abraham had Isaac,
Isaac had Jacob,
Jacob had Judah and his brothers,
Judah had Perez and Zerah (the mother was Tamar),
Perez had Hezron,
Hezron had Aram,
Aram had Amminadab,
Amminadab had Nahshon,
Nahshon had Salmon,
Salmon had Boaz (his mother was Rahab),
Boaz had Obed (Ruth was the mother),
Obed had Jesse,
Jesse had David,
and David became king.

David had Solomon (Uriah's wife was the mother),
Solomon had Rehoboam,
Rehoboam had Abijah,
Abijah had Asa,
Asa had Jehoshaphat,
Jehoshaphat had Joram,
Joram had Uzziah,
Uzziah had Jotham,
Jotham had Ahaz,
Ahaz had Hezekiah,
Hezekiah had Manasseh,
Manasseh had Amon,
Amon had Josiah,

Josiah had Jehoiachin and his brothers,
and then the people were taken into the Babylonian exile.

When the Babylonian exile ended,

Jeconiah had Shealtiel,
Shealtiel had Zerubbabel,
Zerubbabel had Abiud,
Abiud had Eliakim,
Eliakim had Azor,
Azor had Zadok,
Zadok had Achim,
Achim had Eliud,
Eliud had Eleazar,
Eleazar had Matthan,
Matthan had Jacob,
Jacob had Joseph, Mary's husband,
the Mary who gave birth to Jesus,
the Jesus who was called Christ.

¹⁷ There were fourteen generations from Abraham to David,
another fourteen from David to the Babylonian exile,
and yet another fourteen from the Babylonian exile to Christ.

(In church, the passage will be read out loud by a brave soul, Jan Narracci!)

Did you read this list, really read this list? Or did you find it long, boring, and irrelevant--let's get to the point, preacher-lady!! Why on earth, you are no doubt asking me about now, did I pick this obscure passage to have read to you on Mother's Day, of all days? Why read some boring old so-and-so begat thus-and such out of the Old Testament today?

It may surprise you to know that this is the starting scripture, not of the *Old Testament*, but of the *New*. This is how *Matthew* starts out his *Gospel* writing—Chapter One, verse one. For him, as for his people, the Jewish people surviving poverty and oppression just a few decades after the time of Jesus, the family history is very important, *all important*. It is this identification with the ancient family line that breathes life into a new—and old—religious way of being that will come to be known as Christian....

(Jan reads her matriarchal family tree)

We do not often do what Jan did for us this week for our Mother's Day worship. We post-modern Americans rarely define ourselves in terms of our family tree anymore. Some of us are purebred folks, but most of us are of mixed—and mixed up—heritage, especially out here in the more Western reaches of our country. Most Americans are just not hard-wired this way this many generations along.

We come from all over, we move from all over, and our interactional family portrait gets smaller and smaller as we spread out further and further. I do not define myself to others as a Hanson or a Johnson, a Mumey, or a Printz, or now a Dawson, unless by chance I meet another with the same family name. Then I may take notice, but with a quickly-passing interest. I am more apt to define myself by

where I live, how I worship, how I vote, and what sports teams I follow than by my family names.

The Biblical writers largely ignored the female character. When they wrote of a woman, she was often unnamed, or perhaps named but identified only by her lesser circumstance or profession, such as prostitute, adulteress, temptress, a beggar woman, or a wandering nomad. Rarely are women of the Bible honored or venerated. Mother's Day is not a day we find celebrated in our sacred text.

(Angie reads her matriarchal family tree)

Some of us have proud matriarchal lines. We know those women who share our interests and, in whose footsteps, we have walked.

But others of us, the tender years ones of us, perhaps only know one or two or maybe a few women in our family tree. What will we teach them? Who will they get to know and learn from? We have a responsibility to the family line to study the family line. And this is true for those among us who are adopted into loving families, who are products of or who are folded into blended families, too. We must teach our young ones the value of Matthew's first writing, the value of history, the value of *their* unique history.

(Katie reads her matriarchal family tree)

I am of this family line.

I belong.

I am young, but I matter.

I bear a rich and varied story, and I carry it forward to others in my line, whether to my own children or to my own heart children, whether to my siblings or my aunts and uncles or cousins by birth, by marriage, or by the choice of those who have adopted me as my parents. We are all one. We are all family.

We listen to the voices of experience, and their voices are rich, they are deep, they are time-hewn. It *matters* to the Jews that they are family. It matters to them as they are scattered upon the earth into different tribes. It matters to them even as they war with each other, for they are proud and their pride battles against birthright and the perceived slights of denied birthright.

It *matters* to Joseph that his family survived and that his father might see and touch him again before he passes on. It matters to our ancestors in faith as their homes are destroyed and their loved ones are separated from them and they are taken into slavery over and over again.

And it matters to the Jewish family that they are able to reconnect as they are freed from captivity and they gather back in Jerusalem to again build their temple and to read in the public square their scriptures.

Family matters. Lineage matters. *Mothers matter. Women matter.*

(Ardie reads her family tree)

And then, at last, there are the grand matriarchs of our living time. Our wise ones. Our survivors. Our great-grandmothers, who are our grandmothers, who are our mothers, who are our sisters, our daughters, our aunts, our nieces, and our cousins. These are the women we celebrate today, too. They embody a history that Katie can only dream about.

Our living reminders of the importance of family, these are who we celebrate on this Mother's Day. Our walking encyclopedias, our doctors without degrees, our psychologists, our teachers, our priests, our confessors. These are the venerated ones that can help us put the names under the photographs in the ancient volumes of our family albums we store under the stairs or in the basements or upon the bookshelves of our homes. These are the ones who teach us the real value of community and of family, of what it means to belong up and down and far and wide and inside and out to the family of Christ.

These are the women that live between the sentences in our Bibles, the knowing ones, the ones whose eyesight fail in direct proportion to how their heart-sight strengthens with every passing year. These are the leaves of the tree that are so thick, we cannot see the trunk once their flowering branches take hold.

(Shirley reads her matriarchal family tree)

We honor our women today, the women of our families, the women of our church family, the women of the extended family of Christ. History is important. Matthew's family tree is *important*. To the survivors of the world's many holocausts, many of which caught these ancient people of ours up in death and destruction over and over, the lineage is important. It is life-giving. It is hope spoken out over the Temple Square in Jerusalem, in the synagogues of the free world, in the colleges and workplaces, kitchens and libraries of the people of God, wherever we faithful family members are gathered in the name of the Holy One.

We are Christians. We belong in Matthew's line of the Jewish and Hebrew fathers and mothers. He put us there when he put Jesus there, for we are Jesus' people. We are family. We are all one, this Holy Mother's Day.

And the people say as One Family, "Amen. Alleluia. Amen"