

New Year's Day, January 1, 2023: THIS DAY'S SERMON

Readings: Matthew 1:1-17; Psalm 132:11-12

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Let us pray: *Holy One, we kneel at your Tree of Life, a holy intersection where life leads us to death and death leads us to life. You create us, claim us, and call us beloved: Members of your own family, not by blood, but through the blood of Christ. It is in the name of Jesus that we pray, we trust, and we give thanks. Amen.*

For many, New Year's Day is a time of reflection mingled with regret, wondering laced with hope. For me, it is also a time for looking back at the way the Spirit has woven itself into my life, our life together, and our world.

As Pastor Phil and I sat in the quiet of Christmas last Sunday, having celebrated the birth of new life for God's world and awaiting the birth of new life within our family, I turned to today's scripture, wondering how our new lectionary would speak in this new year. I have to confess, I was somewhat disappointed.

What in the world do we gain from the reading of these mostly unfamiliar names? What is the significance of the deportation of God's chosen people, their return home, and the birth of Jesus? And why does it matter that it was 14 generations that lived between each of those events?

In the spirit of the celebration of that day, I tucked it away, trusting – or to be honest, hoping – that God would reveal a message. And then, it happened. Our quiet evening was disrupted – interrupted – with a call from Kaley, our daughter.

Her water had broken. They were getting ready to leave their home in Westminster to head to Good Samaritan in Lafayette. Could we come to get their fur baby, Midge? And so it began...

A text string to the six grandparents, which included Kaley, was created by Jake. We simultaneously held our breath and breathed deeply, together, like the breath of child birth, counting the moments ... waiting ... anticipating ... praying ... until ... at 5:05 a.m. on the day after Christmas, when the announcement came from Jake: "She's here." Here, indeed. Another child was born into this world, another precious dream of God made flesh ... one God claims as "beloved".

The significance of the genealogy of Jesus came later, when Kaley called her dad. In the fullness of God's time, Kaley called, reassuring her dad that she was well. Through tears of joy, she told Pr. Phil that she had a request regarding the baby's name.

For months we had known their intention: This baby girl would, most likely, be given the name Sloane, with a middle

name of Kettering, last name Gamsky. Held in their arms, they knew the name was right ... and would be made perfect with one addition: Kaley's voice broke as she asked her dad's permission to give Sloane her full name: *Sloane Margaret Kettering Gamsky*.

As I watched the deep emotion that flowed from Pr. Phil as he took in the sound of his own mother's name being bestowed on his first flesh and blood grandchild, the significance of today's scripture flashed before me. All of the begetting and begetting ... the son of this man by that woman ... it all matters. It matters deeply. It matters that we know the stories of the lives that make our lives move from the emptiness of possibility to the fullness of reality.

Now, in the spirit of transparency, this newest grandchild comes to me by way of love without the benefit of the bloodline from which it flows. But that does not make Sloane Margaret any less my granddaughter – our beloved grandchild.

Similarly, while it is not likely that even one of us here shares the actual genetic traces of the blood that brought Jesus to life, we are each, nonetheless, beloved children of God; sons and daughters to our shared Creator, siblings to Christ.

The bloodline that brought Jesus into the world as *God Made Flesh* has been poured over and into each of us. It is our birthright, given in love, by the One who brings life into the world and creates new life in the midst of brokenness.

The Good News is that we do not need to do a thing to receive this gift. It is simply ours to accept, to believe, to treasure, to live into. That is where the generations that began with God's promise to Abraham and flowed through him to the birth of David and on to the birth of the Messiah take on their importance.

Matthew's Gospel teaches us this morning that 14 generations exist from God's promise to Abraham to the birth of David borne of the stump of Jesse, to the ripping of God's chosen people from their homeland, to the birth of the Messiah. Fourteen generations. Fourteen – a number which carries great significance in Hebrew. A number which signifies deliverance or salvation.

The Prophet Isaiah foretold that a shoot would come up from the stump of Jesse and that from his roots a Branch would bear fruit. A branch which would judge the needy with righteousness and give decisions for the poor of the earth with justice. This branch would strike the earth with the rod of his mouth and slay the wicked with the breath of his lips.

Like God's people Israel, we have been ripped from our heavenly home by the powers of this earthly one. We are challenged to not forget that we, too, each of us, all of God's humanity, are chosen by God to be his beloved.

The one of whom the Prophet Isaiah is the one who carried this cross. This one is Jesus, Emmanuel, God With Us. It is from this One that our own life flows. We are simultaneously held within the womb of God and borne into abundant life through the blood which flowed to and through and from Christ. We are created and claimed, called and named beloved of God; branches of God's grace and peace extending into the world.

In this New Year, I invite you to reflect on your own family tree. How many generations do you know? How many of those generations can you name? How often do you read their names or speak them out loud? They ... and you ... are part of the genealogy of Christ. In Christ, we move from the emptiness of possibility to the fullness of reality.

This Tree is not dead. God's dream is still alive. God has brought us together, in the fullness of this time, to carry the possibility and promise of hope and new life into the world. May we claim our inheritance as God's beloved, bearing life and love into the world with righteousness and justice.

Amen. Let it be so.