

2022.11.27 - Advent - Origins

So What? You are not on your own; you belong in God's family which has a purpose to it.

Feel What? Hopeful

Now What? How do you see God working to redeem the knots in your family's tree? How can you be a part of creating a healthy family culture?

INTRODUCTION

Today, we celebrate the first Sunday of Advent, and we're beginning a new message series called Foretold and Fulfilled. We're going to be looking at prophecies of the Old Testament and how they're fulfilled in Jesus and, specifically, how we see them play out in his birth narrative.

But before we get started, I need to tell you that I'm terrible at giving most people what they want from Christmas sermons. My guess is that most of us want some charming talk about Baby Jesus and then we end with a poem and some Christmas carols. I don't have any problems with that, per se, but when I read the New Testament writers talk about Jesus being born, I get really excited and messed up at the same time. I read the Nativity stories less like a sentimental Silent Night scene, and more of a Navy Seal insurgency under the cover of night behind enemy lines. Jesus being born was an operation an eternity in the planning, and he was installed on his manger-throne to topple world governments. That is what excites me and messes me up all at the same time—it's less Hallmark Channel and more Die Hard (the best Christmas movie ever, by the way.)

What about you? How do you read these stories? And if this 9 lb 6 oz Baby Jesus has come to reorder our world, are we ready for that? Can we handle that?

If Advent feels like a mixed bag of things you can't even put your finger on, you're not alone. Fleming Rutledge has written and preached on the theme of Advent for decades. She says:

Fleming Rutledge: "Advent Begins Where Human Potential Ends": "The biblical story is rigorously unsentimental. It doesn't offer optimism. It doesn't offer 'positive thinking.' It looks deeply into human misery, human folly, human pain, and plain old human disappointment. ...The Advent season, properly understood,

is designed to help us understand [and] strengthen us for life in the real world, where there are malignant forces actively working against human well-being and the divine purposes of God. This is a world in which no one seems to know what to do about the catastrophic famine in [parts of the world]. This is a world in which the promise of freedom and democracy in [other places] is shifting before the eyes of the world into oppression and autocracy. This is a world in which our very best intentions turn against us. Advent always begins in the dark. But there is a 'but,' and we find it revealed in the story that the scriptures tell.”

So, that's what we're going to do today and over the next few weeks. We're going to look at the catastrophe of the human condition and the looking forward to a Savior to come and relieve us of our pain and trauma.

One book that I've just recently began reading is *You Are Not Your Own* by Alan Noble. In it, he identifies a significant problem we all face as we navigate our cultural moment: Everything has been ordered to tell you that you belong to yourself and everything is for you and about you. You belong to yourself, and you're free to do as you like.

Alan Noble, *You Are Not Your Own*: “If I am my own and belong to myself, the first and most significant implication is that I am wholly responsible for my life. This is both an exhilarating and terrifying thought. And it's not just that I am responsible for my personal survival, for food and shelter and so on. I also need a reason to live. I need purpose and direction. I need some way to know when I am failing at life and when I am succeeding, when I am living ethically and when I am not. I must have some way of determining on my deathbed that I lived a good, full life. ...Even when we discover our true self or create our own identity, we still need some kind of external validation, and so we must express ourselves—a process called 'expressive individualism.' We are our own and belong to ourselves, but identity always requires the acknowledgment of other people. There's a tension here, and you can find it all over our culture. On one hand there is the pull of autonomy: 'I am my own; only I can define myself; it doesn't matter how other people see me, only how I see myself.' But on the other hand, there is the pull for recognition that is inherently a part of identity: 'People must acknowledge me for who I am and see me how I desire to be seen.' ...Everyone is on their own private journey of self-discovery and self-expression, so that at times, modern life feels like billions of people in the same room shouting their own name so that everyone else knows they exist and who they are—which is a fairly accurate description of social media. To be recognized is to draw the gaze and the

attention of others. To be affirmed is to draw their positive gaze. But if we are all responsible for creating and expressing our own identities, then everyone is in competition with everyone else for our limited attention, and no one is secure enough in their own identity to ground us with their approval. How can we cope with such fierce competition?”

Alan Noble, *You Are Not Your Own*: “Social media companies are forced to contract small armies of content moderators to check each flagged item and judge it according to the evolving community standards of the platform. That means men and women spending hours of a day at a cubicle staring at images of rape, murder, child abuse, animal abuse, torture, terrorism, and so on. ...To treat the trauma inflicted on their employees by the technique of social media moderation, the contracted companies introduce coping techniques: counseling, yoga, wellness breaks, and so on. These methods were almost certainly chosen with great care—and great legal counsel—for their ability to reduce anxiety (and liability) in the workplace with as little cost as possible. ...The reports about these contracted moderation companies are grim. In one investigation, The Verge found that employees at a Facebook moderation office in Phoenix, Arizona, were developing drug habits to cope. They turned to dark humor. They suffered panic attacks. They had sex with each other as a form of ‘trauma bonding.’ All the while, social media companies keep these employees at arm’s length by hiring them as contractors, not full-time employees. ...Sharing photos online aids us in defining and expressing our identity and interpreting meaningful moments in our lives. But it comes at the cost of thousands of people’s exposure to the worst that humans have thought and said and done.”

This is but one of the many tradeoffs of living in a world that says we’re belong to ourselves and we must create our own identities. Our ease with these social tools creates situations in which others are dehumanized and suffer because of our collective self-expression.

Transition: Now, I want us to look at two verses from the Old Testament, beginning in the beginning in Genesis.

SOLUTION

What we find in this particular chapter of Genesis is the soon-to-be death of the beloved Jacob. His sons are gathered around him to hear his final words and to see him pass on

the traditional fatherly blessing. One by one, each receives words of affirmation and prediction. They are a prophecy of the direction of each tribe—the collection of families that will expand from each son’s lineage and form the nation of Israel. Jacob sets his attention on his fourth-oldest, Judah, and says:

Genesis 49:8-10, NIV: “Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s sons will bow down to you. You are a lion’s cub, Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse him? The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his.”

What we immediately see is that an entire group of people are being shaped by a blessing by their patriarch. This blessing doesn’t happen in a vacuum and it doesn’t get shouted into a void. In other words, individuals and families who are a part of the tribe of Judah, as well as the other tribes of Israel, have a shared identity that is bestowed upon them, not simple made up by each person. To be a part of this community is to be formed by this shared identity that has been prophetically declared over them as the Word of their God. Their choice is to live under it or to reject it—but never to alter it.

So that’s point one. The second point about this has to do with the prophecy itself. It’s an Advent prophecy because it focuses on a ruler that will come out of Judah’s lineage. This ruler, who we realize is Jesus, is said to have lion-like qualities and he will rule over not just Judah or Israel, but over all the other nations of the world. Indeed, Jesus is called in Scripture the Lion of the tribe of Judah, which points to this very sentence uttered by Jacob.

And the second Scripture I want us to look at today is another prophecy from the Second book of Samuel. Here, we see King David who, by the way, is a part of the tribe of Judah, and as he has conquered all his enemies and brought peace to his nation, he looks out at what he has accomplished. As he does so, he finds an overwhelming desire to build for God a great temple so God’s presence can dwell and he can be worshiped. But the prophet Nathan delivers a message to David saying that he won’t be allowed to do that. But, as an act of grace, God will preserve David’s lineage forever in Israel:

2 Samuel 7:11-12, 16, NIV: “The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and

blood, and I will establish his kingdom. ...Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.”

Two things here: First, this may not seem importance to us in the modern era, but in ancient times carrying on the family name was of the utmost importance. It represented strength and vigor to have your name, or your house, endure. When an enemy army conquered a land, they often sought to snuff out the king's line by killing all the males in the household. So when God guarantees to David that his house will endure forever, this is a huge relief and promise of prosperity.

Second, this is known as the Davidic covenant. And while David most likely thought in terms of a physical offspring to carry on his name, Jesus, known as the son of David, is the full realization of this promise who eternally rules as the rightful King and Savior of the world.

And these two Scriptures find expression in an important place: In the genealogy of Jesus in the Gospels. The birth narratives of Jesus are kicked off by an intentional recording of his family line to trace back where he has come from as he steps into the human experience. It's such a fantastic thing to think of the eternal and unmade God stepping into human history in the form of a baby who has relatives you can trace through his family tree. And as we look at that, there are some interesting things the author is trying to communicate:

Matthew 1:1-17, NIV: This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers...Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon...and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon. After the exile to Babylon: Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel...and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah. Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.

I have obviously abbreviated things for us, but what I want you to see is that Matthew draws our attention to three sets of fourteen names. In the Hebrew writing, this would be like a royal exclamation point, meaning Matthew wants his readers to know that we're dealing with king stuff here. He locates Jesus in a family line that's both very Jewish—coming from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and very much a part of the royal line of David.

So, as I've alluded to, Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecies from Jacob and from Nathan that both point to a Ruler who will come from the line of Abraham and sit on David's throne forever to rule over the nations.

Transition: Let's talk now about how this affects us today.

APPLICATION

1. Inclusion is God's choice

To be included in Judah's family and to live with this prophecy shaping your destiny is up to God. And, we're ultimately included in God's family because of his kindness—not because of anything we deserve.

Tremper Longman, Genesis: "It appears that God does not choose based on human entitlement or custom. Ancient Semitic ideas gave preference to the firstborn, but God does not work according to those expectations. On what basis does he choose? Grace. There is nothing about [Bible characters] that determines this choice, only God. What does this mean for us? As we think about our own 'status' before God, we have to recognize that there is nothing in us that led to God's choice. We are not smarter, bigger, more spiritually sensitive, stronger than others. We can thank only God. For this reason there is no boasting."

2. Jesus is no ordinary king

While most other kinds prized their pure bloodlines and even created mythology to claim they had descended from Zeus, the genealogy of Jesus embraces every knot in the family tree. Take a look with me at four specific parts:

Matthew 1:1-17, NIV: Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar...Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth...David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife...Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.

There are five women named in Jesus' lineage at a time where women were not valued and especially not included in any kind of dignified genealogy. And when we look at who these women are, we realize how bold of a statement Matthew is making.

Tamar was twice-widowed and was spurned by her father-in-law Judah who should have provided for her. Instead, he mistook her for a prostitute and ended up taking her as his own wife.

Rahab was a prostitute who hid the Israelite spies in Jericho and saved their lives.

Ruth was a Canaanite, a foreigner to the nation of Israel who traveled with her mother-in-law after her husband dies.

Uriah's wife was Bathsheba, who David impregnated after using his kingly power to pressure her into sleeping with him, and then he had Uriah killed to cover his tracks.

And Mary was the recipient of an angelic visitation announcing an unplanned pregnancy through the power of the Holy Spirit. Some extra-biblical tradition holds that this created a stigma for her because she was accused of sleeping with a Roman centurion.

So, each of these women had were seen having negative and unredeemable issues. But King Jesus folds each of them into his family line, restores their dignity, and embraces each as his matriarch.

There is no one too far from the grasp of God's grace to be welcomed into his family.

3. God has a purpose for you in your family

There's a reason you live in your family. Maybe not everything about it lines up perfectly with God's plan. And, yeah, your mom might be a little cringe and your dad may tell the worst dad jokes. You might be tempted to forge your own way and create your own identity apart from it. But you would be missing out on a greater plan that God has in mind.

We often measure in months or years, but God measures in generations. He plays the long game. So, my invitation to you is to dig in a be rooted in the family location God has placed you in. And be patience as God works out his purpose in you and through you and through your family line.

Maybe even ask yourself, What are the great values my family holds dear? Are there things like hospitality or compassion or humility that distinguishes your family from others in the neighborhood? Lean into that and embrace that as your positive family culture. That's not to cover up or bypass some of the real harm that our families may have done—maybe the healthiest thing you've done with your family is to draw very clear boundary lines. Even in that is some kind of redemptive act that will leave a lasting impact on future generations.

Transition: With that, I want to give you a simple exercise this week to think about Jesus' lineage and your own family dynamics.

CONCLUSION

Next Step:

- How do you see God working to redeem the knots in your family's tree? How can you be a part of creating a healthy family culture?

Prayer

This world of identity creation has taken its toll.