



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

December 1, 2013

"Finding Our Home In Christ - Matthew 1:1-17

Jenny Sung

When I first found out today's sermon was on Matthew 1, verses 1-17, I looked it up and it was a genealogy list of Jesus, and it read from name to name to name, for 47 names in a row! At first I thought Pastor Dan was playing a joke. You know, like, "Let's make the rookie staff member preach on 42 generations of names." Good one Pastor Dan, very funny! But then I realized, it was no joke.

I thought, "Why couldn't I get a *good* scripture?" You know, the ones people quote all the time? Why couldn't I get something like, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!" Or something on the fruit of the Spirit! You don't often hear, "As the Bible says, 'Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron,' Hallelujah!"

I thought about going through the names in the scripture reading, but the probability of me butchering the precious names was pretty high. So Pastor Drew, thank you for finding this wonderful video clip, which gives a visual genealogy of Jesus.

I am grateful to stand before you today, to share God's Word and heart. It's so wonderful being a part of this First Prez family.

Many of you might know me from Hawaiian Islands Ministries where I served as the volunteer manager for 12 years. I'm truly thankful for the leadership and mentoring I've received from Pastor Dan and Pam Chun. It's through my years there that I was mentored in faithfulness, excellence, and vision casting.

In fact, going back to the beginning 16 years ago, I worked under Dee Dee Lee as the education assistant at First Prez on the Keeaumoku Street campus. I had finished grad school and was trying figuring out what to do with the rest of my life. So, 16 years later, I've come back full circle. I never would have predicted that I'd be serving on staff with the Women's Ministry, which Dee Dee Lee led until she retired. Looking back, it has not been a random path, but one where God has purposely led me back to the family called First Prez. Let's pray for God's insight as we dive into today's passage.

Lord, open our hearts and minds to receive Your Word today. Remove what is not of You, and give us a deeper understanding of who You are and how great Your love is for us. In Jesus Name we pray, Amen.

When you look at the genealogy in the first 17 verses, as a modern reader, you may wonder why Matthew opens with such a list of name after name. It's not usually a passage we hunt for in the Bible. Let's have our morning coffee and devotion...and study 42 generations of names!

So why does Matthew start off like this? Well, to a first century Jewish person, it would have been quite interesting and impressive that the pedigree of Jesus could be traced back to Abraham. Genealogy and numerology were important and it was common practice to record a man's lineage, to identify a man's life in this manner. Matthew recorded the lineage branching from Abraham to King David, then from King David to Jesus. Jesus' genealogy showed His royal identity, His pedigree from Abraham in 42 generations. But what is the point?

Matthew uses the familiar to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament predictions of the Messiah—who descended from Abraham and King David. Scriptures in Genesis, 2 Samuel, Jeremiah and others all point to the Messiah coming from the line of Abraham, a descendant of Jacob, a descendant of King David. Take a look at this passage in Jeremiah 23:5.

5 The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

In fact, there are hundreds of Messianic passages in the Old Testament. For those of you who are familiar with Josh McDowell, he wrote the bestseller book, "Evidence That Demands a Verdict". The book details numerous Messianic prophecies and how they were fulfilled. So when you look at this genealogy, it speaks of identity—who Jesus is, where He comes from, and that He is indeed the Messiah.

Now consider the significance of this. This is the family line of the Messiah, King of kings, Lord of lords. You would think you'd find the best of the best, an incredible list of the lineage of Jesus. But when you study the stories of the characters, when you read about them, what you find is that the genealogy of Jesus contains many flawed human beings, imperfect and fallen.

First, let's take a look at a couple of the women in this genealogy, which by the way, would have been unheard of in that day—inconceivable! Women were possessions, had no identity to themselves, and you would have never found them in genealogies. Hence, it is unprecedented of how Jesus and the Christian community changed the views of women.

You see the name Ruth in the genealogy, right after it says Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth.

Matthew 1:5 says, "...and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse."

Now Ruth was not even Jewish. She was a Moabite, a foreigner from a despised race. In the Book of Ruth, she's a woman who is childless, then widowed. Her mother-in-law, Naomi, an Israelite, tells Ruth to go back home to Moab, saying that there's nothing more that Naomi can provide for her. But Ruth chooses the true God, and decides to stay with her widowed mother-in-law and, as you know, widows were powerless in the first century, economically disadvantaged in ancient Israel.

Here Ruth showed her loyalty and love. Let's look at Ruth 1:16.

16 *But Ruth said, "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where*

you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God."

Ruth, a childless widow and an outcast, acted in great faith and became the great-grandmother of Israel's great King David and hence an ancestor of the Messiah. But again, remember she is a pagan, non-Jewish, an outcast. But it doesn't stop there.

Let's look at another woman in the genealogy, Rahab. Rahab was a Canaanite woman, again, a non-Jewish pagan, a foreigner. She lived in the walled Canaanite city of Jericho. Rahab's name is mentioned eight times in scripture, and in six of those times, her name is found with the title of "harlot" or "prostitute."

Many commentators believe Rahab was a temple prostitute for the idol-worshiping Canaanites. She's not just a pagan, non-Jewish, but look at her lifestyle! But what does she do? In a time of need, when the Israelites were scoping out the land that God had promised them, Rahab recognized the true God and hid the Israelite spies from her king, risking her life.

Read her words in Joshua 2:11.

11 *As soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no courage left in any of us because of you. The LORD your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below.*

So, do you see how astounding this is? The Messiah's lineage has in it: Gentile, non-Jewish women, who were at the time unbelievers, and one who was a woman of ill repute. What does this say about the Messiah and how He views people?

Okay, now I've been talking about the women, but equal opportunity...the men aren't so squeaky clean either. Let's look at King David. King David, a man after God's own heart, became King of all Israel, and in the midst of his greatness, murdered one of his loyal subjects, took the man's wife for himself and lied. Imagine that it was through this adulterous union that King Solomon was born.

Let's talk about King Solomon. Solomon had great riches and wisdom, built God's temple, but also had great failings. He took many wives and foreign women and fell into idol worship, leading the nation into that same idolatry. Take a look at 1 Kings 11:6-8.

6 So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not completely follow the LORD, as his father David had done.

7 Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem.

8 He did the same for all his foreign wives, who offered

incense and sacrificed to their gods.

In sharing these events, it becomes quite clear that the stories of humanity are not perfect. There is frailty, brokenness, failure and skeletons in the closet. When we study the lineage in Matthew 1, there is no pretension that God uses a perfect pedigree line of perfect people.

So, this is where it all comes home, where we can have great hope—because we see the redemptive power of Christ. If anything, this genealogy shows the essence of the Gospel of God in Jesus Christ. *"I have come", said Jesus, "to call not the righteous, but sinners."* (Matthew 9:13).

As Pastor Dan often says of our church, "First Prez is a hospital for sinners, not a museum of saints". As we start the Advent season, hear this message of hope, that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not about perfection. It's about broken and flawed people, like you and me, finding a home in the heart of God.

Jesus as Messiah was fully human, fully divine. He had no sin, but He understands humanity in all of our imperfections. He empathizes, He reaches out, and He wants to call us home.

Home is a concept that's different for each of us. For some, home evokes positive memories. It's a place of

warmth and security, full of good memories. For others, it's non-existent, not so familiar.

For me, home changed constantly. Every two to three years we moved to different country. My father was a diplomat, appointed as an ambassador representing South Korea. My oldest sister was born in Brazil, the middle one in South Korea, and I was born in Peru.

From then on, every two to three years it was a new country, a new culture, a new residence and school to adjust to. So when people ask me, "Where's your hometown, or where do you call home?" I often pause because the concept of home was ever-changing for me.

Traveling so much had tremendous benefits and having to always adapt made me resilient. It helped mold me into who I am today. But my life would not model the definition of a stable home base.

Still for others, the concept of home is extremely painful, or negative and challenging. It doesn't evoke warm and fuzzy memories. Instead, it triggers waves of pain, anger, and loss.

I think of the scene in the movie, "Forrest Gump", where Jenny and Forrest are taking a walk in the woods after Jenny returns home. She sees her house where she grew up and remembers the abuse, and the negative feelings overcome her.

This one of my favorite movies, and to be honest, I think many of us can identify with the character of Jenny and those emotions.

You can say there's a bit of Jenny is all of us. It may not have been abuse, perhaps it's a strained or failed relationship, an addiction, a lack of forgiveness, a financial burden or a physical challenge. Yes, the story of humanity is full of rocks, and yet, God gives an invitation to everyone. He takes what is imperfect, and He invites us to make a home with Him.

The genealogy of Jesus is the beginning of the Gospel message—that He came for a fallen and broken world to invite us to belong to Him, to find our identity and home in Him. Through belief in Christ, He makes us His children and invites us to have a meaningful, powerful and personal relationship with Him.

In Christ we find our true home. In Christ we find our identity. And in Christ we become a part of His family! It's a home like we've never known before.

Look at these verses from the apostle John.

John 1:12 - *But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.*

1 John 3:1b - *See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.*

When we believe, we become His children and heirs in Christ. This is not through works or deeds or any level to attain. It's only purely by His grace and His extended hand to us. And all we have to do is take that hand. When we believe, we become a part of His family and He makes His home in us.

Some may think, "I'm not good enough for God or church." But hear this message of hope. What we have studied today shows that God is for everyone. Jesus the Messiah, though perfect, carries the brokenness of our lives and then redeems it!

There is incredible redemptive power when we walk with Christ!

I love how the New Living Translation in Ephesians 3:17 puts it: *"Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong."*

So, as we start this Advent season and take communion, know that Jesus, who came to people as great and fallen as the stories in the Bible, loves us all. And The Messiah invites us to believe, take His hand, follow Him...and He will lead us home.

* * * * *

Note: Jenny Sung is the Director of Women's Ministries at First Prez. The Sunday sermon texts are also found at fpchawaii.org. The audio version can be downloaded from iTunes or fpc.posterous.com. It can also be sent to you by e-mail. Request the free audio version: fpchkoolau@gmail.com