

Sermon Text for January 15, 2023

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I Samuel 1:21-28, Matthew 1:1-17

“Chosen by God from birth”

I really don't follow celebrity news much, but something caught my eye this week, probably because I had genealogy on my mind because of our Gospel reading for today. Julia Roberts discovered that she wasn't a Roberts biologically, but rather her great great grandfather had died before her great grandfather was born and the father was probably a neighbor who lived 4 houses away. A bit scandalous and very much of a surprise. She isn't biologically a Roberts at all.

Almost 20 years ago when Stacy and I were working in Italy at an orphanage my mom and dad and a couple of my brothers and their significant others took a drive around Europe to visit all the places where my dad had worked. He was in early onset of Alzheimers so we wanted to do this while he could still remember it. We went to Scotland and to the main castle there which contains books of all the Scottish names there and their history. My middle name is Kelton and I was told that it was a long family name with Scottish roots. So I get to these books and get to the Ks and guess what name was not in the books. Kelton.

So my mom is there and I say mom, I thought you said that Kelton was a Scottish family name. Well, I thought it was, I'm not really sure where it came from. My world was rocked right. Wait, who am I. I knew I was a Robert because my dad loved Robert Kennedy and he was assassinated right before I was born, I knew I was a Bronkema but...Our backgrounds and our family trees aren't always as neat and clean as we would imagine or certainly as we would like.

That is certainly the case with Jesus' genealogy. I told you that we would look at all of Matthew including the genealogy. Jesus' genealogy is not pristine or perfect, in fact it contains some elements that we could even call, well in the theme of this Gospel, unrighteous. Who remembers the definition of righteousness? Acting in accordance with the will of God. There were definitely people in Jesus' lineage who did not act in accordance with the will of God, and those who suffered because others did not act in accordance to the will of God and as a result they produced children.

Both of our Scriptures speak to a clear correlation of a child who from birth has been chosen by God for God's purposes. I want every single person here in this sanctuary today, and

if you have kids in the nursery I want you to go home and teach them this very clearly, everyone should leave here knowing beyond a shadow of a doubt that they are not a mistake or a coincidence but rather that God has chosen you from birth to be his child and to be righteous. God has chosen you to act according to his purposes, to his will. Let's read.

READ

Our first Scripture is a great Scripture. The background. Hannah, Samuel's mother, was barren and prayed to God and promised that if she would conceive and bear a child that this son would be promised to the priesthood and would live there forever. God responds and eventually this child becomes the one who anoints Saul as King and then goes on to anoint King David as well. So this promise plays itself out and produces some pretty important fruit in God's designs.

But here we find ourselves in the very beginning of his life, at his birth and soon after. Hannah's husband is going up to the temple and she stays behind because she wants to wean him before she leaves him to be with the priests for the rest of his life. You can understand that, right? Look at vs.23 where we read that God's word must be established and his word is seen in vs.11 where she promises this son to God from birth. So this is a literal story where a child is born promised to God from birth. Our sermon title for today which is chosen from God from birth is a literal description of Samuel.

We see here that Hannah is not only willing but actually initiated her righteousness by acting in accordance with the will of God. Samuel was clearly set aside for God's purposes from birth but it took his mother to carry out his destiny, God's purposes which was to claim him as his worker from birth.

We find in our reading in Matthew Jesus genealogy. The Greek work here in vs. 1 that we have as genealogy can also mean birth. An account of the birth of Jesus it could read. Obviously Jesus was chosen by God, here we could also clearly say that Jesus was God from birth. At first glance it just look like a bunch of names that really don't mean anything, but this is why we are gathered here today is to look at Scripture and understand what God is telling us today. Can God tell us anything in a genealogy today? I certainly think so.

There are 5 women that are mentioned in Jesus' genealogy. Can you find them? Let's look at them together. The first we read about is in vs. 3, Tamar is mentioned. We can read about Tamar in Genesis 38 where we think that she is a Canaanite woman who was married to the sons of Judah and then eventually is forgotten by her father-in-law when both of her husbands die. She pretends to be a prostitute and father's a child from her father-in-law because

he did not follow through. So Perez came into this world as the result of a mother who pretended to be a prostitute to her father in law.

In vs.5 we get woman numbers 2 and 3. Rahab who was the foreigner from Jericho who helped Joshua bring down the wall in the battle of Jericho. Rahab who was the prostitute who lived on the wall and was with the Jewish spies for who knows what reason, but we can imagine. She is Jesus' ancestor. Ruth is a Moabites who also through cunning was able to find a husband is listed in Jesus' family tree.

The fourth woman is not mentioned by name but is found in vs.6, the wife of Uriah. Who wants to tell me her name? Who wants to say her name? We all know it. That's right, Bathsheba, the woman who was raped by David and produced an offspring who was in Jesus hereditary line. Finally, the last woman, one who was pregnant out of wedlock and whose husband almost divorced her but for the divine interference who commanded her fiancé to stay with her. Mary, who while righteous, probably carried the mark her whole life, and her child did as well, of one being conceived out of wedlock.

This is Jesus' genealogy. All of the women mentioned in Jesus' lineage are caught up in a somewhat controversial background, at no fault of their own. As we begin the Gospel of righteousness it would seem that Jesus began his life, was born, at least in the midst of a family which was clearly caught up in unrighteousness, often the victims of unrighteousness. Victims often get blamed for their conditions and it can scar them not just for their life but for the generations to come as well.

Our own backgrounds are less than perfect as well, but that does not diminish our choseness. We are not defined by our birth narrative but rather we are defined by the fact that we are a child of God from the beginning of our life. We are chosen by God from birth. But it doesn't always feel that way. Our background can impact how others see us and how we see ourselves.

I learned a lot when I lived in Russia, that experience really shaped me and helped to crystallize what I have seen and experienced in other areas of my life. When you live in Russia you quickly see the impact of living nearly 100 years under communist rule can do to the psyche and the culture of a nation. The vestiges of this tragic time in the life of Russia can be seen in people who are wired for fear, distrust, the need to see strength from their leaders. 100 years of living under conditions that are so psychologically demanding shape you and change you and create within you a way of living that is not seen in other parts of the world.

Your background, how you have suffered, impacts you, your history can shape you and can impact what you think you are capable of doing and limits what you are offered and able to do and what you think is even possible. So, if 100 years has done this to the Russian society, what effect do you think 250 years of living in slavery and 150 years of living in a diminished state, what does that do to a people? If 100 years living in communist rule leaves a mark that is distinguishable and visible today and still a part of the fabric of the people, why is it so hard for us to see the visible and distinguishable mark that still exists within our culture and society and institutions from 250 years of slavery.

We live in a country that continues to promulgate the systems and the mentality that governed us generations ago. As Americans we continue to see each other defined by how our ancestors saw each other, and not based upon this basic truth that we have all been chosen by God since birth. That chosenness does not know distinction. It baffles me that people think we have racism behind us or that there could be any sort of racism against those who look like us when all you have to do is look at our history that is so clear and has left such a mark. I bet if you asked a Russian if they are aware of the culture of fear and conspiracy that is present they would say know, just like if you ask many of us if there is a culture of repression and systems of oppression still present most of us, I would guess, would say no. It is all we know.

But that is not the righteousness in which we are called to live. What family we were born into does not define in God's eyes our righteousness. We have been living and acting against the will of God for generations and we have to repent and change how we act and how we view each other. This responsibility is primarily on us as white Christians. Until we are willing to confess our historic unrighteousness and act and take steps to counteract its impact we will be living outside of God's will potentially without even realizing it.

You see, Jesus was able to teach us the way of righteousness even with the odds stacked against him. We have been chosen by God from birth and nothing can change that status. Jesus was David's son not as a result of male procreation but by the direct will of God. We are children of God not by male procreation but by the will of God. The function of the genealogy here in Matthew is less about the historicity of it and more about the relationships between the individuals and God's plan for them.

Like Jesus' family line so the church is composed of people and events that aren't linear between us and God but more indirect and even questionable. The Gospel of righteousness begins with some question marks as far as the beginning of its protagonist, Jesus, in a setting and

lineage that might be less than righteous. But God prevails and chooses us from birth to a life of righteousness. Amen.