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November 24, 2019
Genesis 38:12- 19; 24-26

Unlikely Women Who Bring Glory to God

In the course of time the wife of Judah, Shua's daughter, died. When Judah was comforted, he went up to Timnah to his sheepshearers, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. 13 And when Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep," 14 she took off her widow's garments and covered herself with a veil, wrapping herself up, and sat at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. For she saw that Shelah was grown up, and she had not been given to him in marriage. 15 When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. 16 He turned to her at the roadside and said, "Come, let me come in to you," for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. She said, "What will you give me, that you may come in to me?" 17 He answered, "I will send you a young goat from the flock." And she said, "If you give me a pledge, until you send it—" 18 He said, "What pledge shall I give you?" She replied, "Your signet and your cord and your staff that is in your hand." So he gave them to her and went in to her, and she conceived by him. 19 Then she arose and went away, and taking off her veil she put on the garments of her widowhood.

24 About three months later Judah was told, "Tamar your daughter-in-law has been immoral. Moreover, she is pregnant by immorality." And Judah said, "Bring her out, and let her be burned." 25 As she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-law, "By the man to whom these belong, I am pregnant." And she said, "Please identify whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff." 26 Then Judah identified them and said, "She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah." And he did not know her again." (Genesis 38:12-26).

"Bring forth the royal diadem."

"Let every kindred, every tribe on this terrestrial ball, to him all majesty ascribe."

"Hail him who saves you by his grace, and crown him Lord of all."

"All hail the power of Jesus' name."

Today, the last Sunday of the church year, is Christ the King Sunday.

We are reminded that Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again in final victory.

How do we get from the racy, sordid story of incest in this dysfunctional family -- which includes Judah and Tamar -- to the message of Jesus who is the perfect, sinless Son of God?

Hang on. We will get there.

First, though, from last Sunday: Can you name the clothing we are to put on every morning?

Compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

We also talked about maturing from being thankful to having gratitude to giving thanks. As we celebrate Thanksgiving this week let us remind ourselves to give thanks to God first and foremost and always.

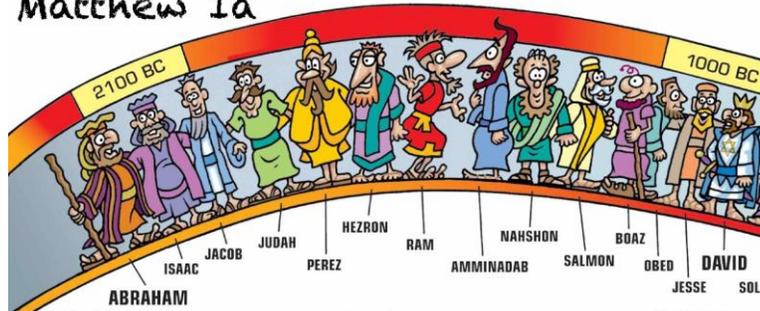
You cannot say you love God and have excuses when it comes to your offerings. "No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money. (Mt 6:24) You cannot turn to God in your need and then turn away when it comes to giving to God. It is Thanksgiving season. Praise, worship and honor God with trust and joyful giving.

Last week we wrote notes of something new for which we are thankful. You have the opportunity again this week. Let us fill our poster board with our expressions of gratitude.

Today we have a little bag with 5 kernels of corn for each person. Put it on your Thanksgiving dinner table as a reminder of the generosity of the native Americans to the first pilgrims who were starving with rations of 5 kernels of corn each. Say a prayer praising God for 5 ways God has blessed you and your family this year.

Now, back to Tamar.

Timeline: Abraham To David Matthew 1a



The Gospel of Matthew begins with:

"A record of the ancestors of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham:

² Abraham was the father of Isaac.

Isaac was the father of Jacob.

Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers."

It covers 42 generations. Many of the names are unpronounceable. It is like reading a phone book. Where is the story? We get impatient and want to skip the list. Yet each one represents a story of God's grace which overcomes all the problems, heartache and sin known to humanity. God has a plan of salvation and redemption and that plan cannot be stopped.

The list goes on:

"Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah,
whose mother was Tamar.

Abr
 aham
 was the
 father of
 Isaac, and
 Isaac the
 father of Jacob,
 and Jacob the
 father of Judah and
 his brothers, and
 Judah the father of Perez
 and Zerah by Tamar, and
 Perez the father of Hezron,
 and Hezron the father of Ram,
 and Ram the father of
 Amminadab, and Amminadab the
 father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the
 father of Salmon, and Salmon the father
 of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of
 Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse,
 and Jesse the father of David the king. And
 David was the father of Solomon by the wife of
 Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and
 Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father
 of Asaph, and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and
 Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of
 Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the
 father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah
 the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and
 Amos the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his
 brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon. And after the
 deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and
 Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and
 Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the
 father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud,
 and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan
 the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph
 the husband
 of Mary, of
 whom was
 b o r n
JESUS
who is called Christ.

What? There is a woman's name in the genealogy? In the genealogy of Jesus? She even has a name! Why? The Jews traced their lineage through the fathers, but in Matthew's genealogy, he recognizes some of the mothers.

Buried in Matthew's long list of names you will find 5 women who are part of the genealogy of Jesus. That is bold and unusual for the patriarchal society of that time. If you look more closely at these matriarchs it becomes scandalous. You wonder how Jesus could descend through them.

Genesis 38 is actually an interruption in the story of Joseph being sold into Egypt by Judah and his brothers. Our hero, young, handsome Joseph escaped the clutches of Potiphar's wife with his morals intact.

In contrast we have Judah who ended up saying that Tamar, his daughter-in-law, is more righteous than he is. It is the first time the word righteous appears in the Bible. In Hebrew it is a verb – not a noun or adjective. He is not saying his sin was greater. He is saying he is a worse sinner.

Tamar had a huge problem. You thought you had family issues.

Judah had 3 sons. He chose Tamar to be the wife of his first son, Er. In those days a woman was considered property and did not have rights or much say about anything that happened in her life.

The Bible says, "The Lord put Er to death because he was immoral" Other translations say wicked. Tamar had no children with him.

As was custom, totally accepted and well-reasoned, Er's brother needed to marry Tamar. Judah sent his second-born son to join with Tamar. The reason was to ensure the continuation of the dead husband's name and lineage. Onan, the second brother, did not like the idea diminishing his inheritance. So he found a way to avoid his responsibility. "The Lord considered what he did as wrong and put him to death".

So here is Tamar twice widowed. Judah tells her: "Stay as a widow in your father's household until my son, Shelah, grows up".

In that culture it was like a death sentence. Who would provide for her, especially in her old age. She did everything right. She obeyed the laws of the land. Remember this was more than 400 years before Moses wrote the laws of the Hebrew people. Tamar had no voice. Men made decisions for her.

Judah never even refers to Tamar by name. Judah promised her his third son.

Did Judah think Tamar was jinxed? Was he being irresponsible and simply forgot about her? Out of sight - out of mind. Why did her own father not speak up for her?

Did Judah blame Tamar for their death? Of course, everybody else is responsible for what has happened but not you. It had to be Tamar's fault she did not have a son. It is her fault that his sons died.

Whatever the reason, Judah lied and did not do justice to Tamar. Judah never got around to giving Shelah to Tamar as he promised.

When Tamar realized that Judah would not give Shelah to her, she took matters into her own hands. She had to find a way to have life, status and protection and to continue the family name. Judah was not going to give her justice.

She was not going to let her life circumstances defeat her. Two husbands died. She had nothing. She was nothing. Tamar was brave. At the same time, she had nothing to lose and everything to gain.

This is something pretty foreign to our western culture and so we have to be careful not to unfairly judge their social and family practices. The Bible does not have one word of condemnation against Tamar.



She risked highly when she tricked Judah. How well she knew Judah, her father in law. She was certain he would not pass by a woman serving as a temple prostitute. He did not recognize Tamar because she hid her face.

Judah thought there would be no consequences for what he did. How wrong Judah was. He thought he would pay generously and she will be happy. "I will send you a young goat". She did not argue about the price. She cared more about proving his identity. As a deposit she asked him to leave: "The ring on that cord around your neck, I also want the special walking stick you have with you." He gave them to her.

Giving these things to Tamar was like giving your driver's license or passport to hold until you returned with the money. It is obvious Judah was completely committed to having sex with this woman who, he thinks, is a prostitute.

They slept together and she became pregnant.

Judah sent a friend with the payment and she could not be found. The local people were insulted because there were not temple prostitutes in the community. Judah became the laughing stock.

Judah thinks the whole sinful deal is over. However, Numbers 32:23 tells us that you can be sure your sins will find you out."

Three months later, Judah finds out that Tamar is pregnant. "Bring her out so she might be burned". "How dare she sleep with another man even though I just visited a prostitute?" It was the worst death penalty he could think of – even worse than stoning. As a man, he had the power to pronounce any penalty he wanted.

He never gave her an opportunity to defend herself or to meet him. In his hypocrisy he declared his judgment.

There once was a Monk named Father Moses. One of the brothers in the monastery broke the rules. Father Moses was called to pass judgment. He refused to come. They called him again. He filled a leaking jug with water and put it on his shoulder and walked to the meeting.

They asked, "Why are you carrying that jug?"

He replied, "My sins run out behind me and I do not see them, but today I am coming to judge the errors of another."

Upon hearing this, the assembled group forgave the brother.

One day Jesus was told to give the verdict upon a sinner. He wrote in the sand and said, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone."

Tamar was ready. "Identify the owner of this signet, cord and staff. He is the father."

Judah saw his seal and his staff. He was confronted with who he truly was. His eyes were opened and he acknowledged that she was more righteous than he, because he had lied to her. He had disobeyed the laws of the land.

His form of justice favored him. He thought he had the right to abuse and neglect a woman in need.

Who are the vulnerable, neglected and oppressed around us today? Are you and I ready to speak up for the suffering and abused. The Bible uses consistently strong language on this subject.

Tamar gave birth to twins: Perez and Zerah. You might say that God replaced the two sons Judah had lost or the husbands Tamar had lost. We read about a wedding blessing nearly a thousand years later when Ruth and Boaz got married. "May your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah."

Tamar and Perez became ancestors of King David and of Jesus.

Genesis 38 includes intrigue, marriage, incest, death, sexual selfishness, lies, prostitution, conspiracy, deception, turn of events and pregnancy. Some parts of the chapter are vivid enough to make anyone blush. It has everything needed to make a good TV show. There are even some ancient CSI images when Tamar presents irrefutable evidence that Judah is the father of the children!

What can we learn from Tamar?

It can be summed up in one word: Grace

Tamar, the Canaanite outsider, a deceiver, was incorporated into the Hebrew people and is part of the lineage of Jesus. By God's grace, the unlikely Tamar and Judah are used to bring Jesus into the world. God also wants to use you with all of your weaknesses to bring Christ to the world.

Neither one lived up to our standard of holiness but God's grace was shown to both of them and God used them for God's glory.

This chapter, ultimately, points to Jesus. He takes the twisted mess of our lives and forgives and cleans through his infinite grace.

Judah and Tamar remind us that God's grace comes in spite of our sin - even through our sin. Grace overcomes the chaos that we make of our lives and provides us with something that we could never provide for ourselves.

God can and does take our greatest mistakes and turns them into the ingredients of God's blessings.

God's grace enters the dysfunction of our lives and through Jesus' death, burial and resurrection and becomes a message of what God's plan is all about.

WOW! A Savior named Jesus...through a woman named Tamar...That's a wonder and it is wonderful

Grace is the sinless Son of God descending from sinful people.

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