

Third Sunday of Advent

December 11, 2022

Ruth 4:11–17

Matthew 1:1–16

“We Wait and Rejoice”

1. I know people who spend a lot of time tracking down their genealogy
 - a. These days, with the help of DNA testing and Genealogy sites, it is incredible how far back one can trace one’s family
 - b. Have you seen that PBS show “Finding Your Roots”? Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. helps famous people go on a journey of discovery of their past.
 - c. Recently my siblings, who have done a great deal of research, told me that our family traces us back to a king in Spain and one in Portugal.
 - i. What do you know about that?!
 - ii. Mom used to say we come from royalty, and we thought she was joking.
 - d. Of course, family trees are not always so simple.
 - i. When our youngest daughter, whom we adopted at age 12, came home from middle school with an assignment to draw a picture of her family tree, it was an emotional and painful reminder of being uprooted from her biological family tree through no fault of her own.
 - ii. Or when an African American person digs back into their roots, it can be so terribly painful, for perhaps they face the brutal reminder of slave women being abused by their masters to produce children or they find a dead end at the shores of this hemisphere unable to trace back beyond the transatlantic slave route.
2. Both of our passages today reference family trees, and they’re stories of both pain and healing, of sorrow and joy.
 - a. We started with the story of Ruth, who was from outside Palestine, and Naomi, her mother-in-law from Bethlehem
 - i. You may recall their life carried such grief over the death of their husbands
 - ii. Eventually, upon returning to Bethlehem, Ruth met Boaz, who as a family member of Naomi’s husband, had a pathway to marry Ruth
 - iii. And as it happens God blessed them with a child
 - iv. The reading ended with a genealogy. Ruth’s son, Obed, is the grandfather of the well-known king David.

- v. And as for Naomi, she found herself caring for this young child in her older age, a full circle from the pain she had endured
 - b. Then we looked at a reimagining of Jesus' family tree.
 - i. I really appreciate this reading.
 - ii. No, it's not action packed, or poetic, or dramatic, but it has a way of lifting out of the shadows the faithful and courageous women and men who raised people God used as instruments of love.
 - iii. We sense the emotional void of not having the names of generations of moms in the line right after the Babylonian exile
 - iv. Jesus' family tree connects him with Ruth and Obed and King David
 - v. The goal of the genealogy was to connect Jesus to the line of God's people dating back to Abraham and Sarah
 - vi. Telling the story, even just using the names of parents, is almost like a review of the history of the people of God, and the audience would have known the background of some of those names
 - 1. They would have known Abraham and Sarah traveled to Palestine
 - 2. They would have known the abuse of power of King David in taking Bathsheba
 - 3. They would have known about the pain of the exile and return
 - vii. But in retelling the lineage, in rehearsing the path of this family tree, they know Jesus as the long anticipated gift from God to lead God's people. The joy in between the lines is there if we pay attention
- 3. Our joy on this Third Sunday of Advent is a full joy, even if nuanced
 - a. Advent's joy is human, complex, exhilarating, life-giving
 - i. That describes well the story of Ruth giving birth (and Naomi fostering the child)
 - ii. That describes well the story of a teenage Miriam / Mary, to whom an angel offers a completely unexpected (traumatic?) beginning of her days as a mom
 - b. Advent's joy is particularly bright today as we celebrate Iyla's baptism
 - i. Iyla is a child of God's promise, and so are we
 - ii. today we have reaffirmed our commitment to helping her grow in the faith, just as we have seen the growth of the confirmation class members who received their bibles

- c. Baptism reminds us we have a spiritual family tree which brings us in, which claims us
 - d. Baptism brings a joy that doesn't paper over grief – so those tears on our cheeks have more than one source
 - e. This Baptism and Advent joy merge today as we await the life-giving birth of our Savior
 - i. As we consider the long line of the faithful who've come before us,
 - ii. As we consider the promising line of amazing leaders we'll have in Ilya and her peers
4. I invite you to consider our spiritual family tree whose roots are fed by these baptismal waters – and to ponder the joy that represents
- a. We are spiritual descendants of joy
 - i. Of people who prayed and gave thanks
 - ii. Who celebrated God's blessings
 - b. We are spiritual descendants of faithfulness
 - i. Of people who shared God's wisdom and grace
 - ii. Who taught us with their actions to fight against injustice
 - c. We are spiritual descendants of courage and creativity,
 - i. of poets and musicians,
 - ii. of teachers and prophets,
 - iii. of healers and nurturers
5. Today, as we rejoice and wait for Advent's blessings, we give thanks for what roots us in God and connects us to one another.