

Reflections from a United Methodist Pastor

September 29, 2024

Lesson 6

Title: The Identity Born in Us

Texts: Matthew 1:1-17

This week's lesson is the first of four on the question: "What Shapes Our Identity?"

Do you like to memorize Scripture? Why don't you commit this week's focal text to memory? Gasp! Look at those names! It is a list of 42 generations from Abraham to Jesus.

Each of us is shaped by family—birth family, adoptive family. I am grateful for a family tradition that nourished me in Christian faith, that expected me to be a good student, that gave me a support system. That has not been everyone's experience. Some are shaped by family tradition; others are shaped by resisting family tradition.

Matthew was addressing a predominantly Jewish audience. It would be important to those readers to recognize that the Messiah came with roots in that tradition. Their practice would be to trace roots through the father, so it includes Joseph, not as the biological father of Jesus (See Matthew 1:18), but as a nurturing parent.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Mary and Joseph had gone there to register because Joseph was in the family line of David (Luke 2:4). Bethlehem was called "the city of David." That connection to the line of David was important in understanding who Jesus was.

What in your own journey do you want to pass on to the next generations? What in your own journey do you hope will not influence the next generations? How do you go about helping that happen (or not happen)?

Would Jesus have been different if he had grown up in Chicago instead of in Nazareth? Would Jesus have told stories about a farmer or about a woman who lost a coin or about a traveler on the road if he had not seen these things as he grew up?

Reflect on your family. How have you been shaped by where you lived? How have you been formed by family expectations? How have you formed new traditions now passed on by your family? Where do you see God's hand in all of this?

Uh, how are you doing on memorizing Matthew 1:1-17? (I'm glad my family did not expect me to do that!)

What Someone Else Has Said:

Pope Francis (*The Joy of the Gospel*, Image) wrote: "...because the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences..."

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Give strength to my family, O God..."

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