

## Infinite Hands Joined in Service and Love

### Matthew 1: 1-17

Let's just take a moment and take it all in. This moment is 175 years in the making, this moment is the culmination of dreams and hopes for people years ago. Let's take a moment and look around, to reflect on what has changed, reflected on what has stayed the same. Let's take a moment to see the faces gathered here on this special occasion, to remember those who are not. Let's take a moment and take it all in. This moment is 175 years in the making. Let's take a moment and take it all in and yes, let's even take a moment to try and figure out which hand is our's on the banner.

175 years....175 years of ministry. 175 years of music. 175 years of mission. 175 years of potlucks. 175 years of committee meetings...okay well, maybe not that one especially those particular meetings which felt like they lasted 175 years.

Let's take a moment and look around....175 years of this community of faith gathering around the Lord's table, breaking bread with one another, extending the Welcome of God to its neighbors within the town of Midway and beyond. It is amazing to think about all the people, to think about all the experiences of faith which have occurred on this spot, to think about the number of meals which have

been served on these sacred grounds. Margaret Ware hit the nail on the head when she titled her book about this community of faith.... "If These Walls Could Talk".

The significance of this moment almost overwhelms us, doesn't it? To think about all the people who are connected to this community of faith, past, present and future, to think about all people who have worshipped not just within this sanctuary, but within the previous building as well. It is almost too overwhelming to know that every time we sit in our pew, stand at the communion table, make the chicken salad or oyster stew recipes, we are filled with a sense of history. Within this space, at this particular time, we realize that we are connected to those who built, lead, and shaped this community of faith all those years ago. And for this gift, we are all truly grateful.

We give thanks for this sense of history because it continues to define who we are as a community of faith. It continues to ground us in a story which is so much larger than who we are as individuals on our own. This sense of history, this sense of connection continues to transform us into the people God created and calls us to be....people of Welcome...just like it is has done for this community of faith for 175 years and just like it will continue to do for this community of faith for the next 175 years.

I have to tell you that as I began planning out the text for this Sunday, I kept coming up blank. There were so many possibilities. Again it was almost too overwhelming to think about, to try and narrow down, to sum up 175 years in one single text. Thankfully the Spirit of God intervened because I was talking with a colleague about my dilemma and she simply said, “Well I know it is not the most exciting part of the Bible but what about Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus. Sure it’s a list of people but what a list. It has it all... good, and bad. It shares some of the history of the people of God, some of the most breath-takingly beautiful moments of the story of God’s people as well as naming some of the moments we would rather forget were part of our history. This genealogy of Jesus points to how God has been and continues to be at work in this world, points to how God has been bringing about healing and wholeness for all of God’s people since the beginning of time. That’s what the community of faith needs to hear on the day of your celebration.

So let’s take a moment and do just that...The list can be found in Matthew 1: 1-17.

(Read Text)

As we look over this list, again it is almost too overwhelming...to think about all their stories, to pronounce some of their names, to think about our connection to these people, to think about their history some 2000 years ago, to know that they are our ancestors in faith. We start out with Abraham. We all remember him, right? We remember how God promised to build a nation through him, telling Abraham that his descendants would be more numerous than the stars. We remember how God promised Abraham that he and his wife Sarah would have a baby at the age of 99 and how Sarah laughed. But sure enough, that promise came true. We remember how Abraham left everything behind, left security, left his extended family, and traveled to an unknown land just to answer the call of his God.

This list of the story of God's people all begins with an act of faith. It starts with an act to answer the call....just like our story does as Midway Christian Church. A group of people had experienced the Spirit of God in their lives so they left the security of a community they knew at Grassy Springs Church and decided to form their own community of faith. They had no place to call their own just yet so they decided to meet in an unfinished woolen mill on Railroad street. They trusted God to provide. They believed in their mission and they came together as one.

Back to the genealogy...it includes some of Israel's kings such as Hezekiah. He was one of the better kings for the nation of Israel. He enacted sweeping religious reforms. He repaired and restored the Temple. He abolished idolatry. He brought the people of Israel back into right relationship with their God. He represented a great time of prosperity for the people of Israel.

His son, Manasseh, who is listed here, not so much. Manasseh is known as one of the worst kings in Israelite history. He basically reversed everything his father did, once again pulling the people of Israel away from their God once more, setting them up for what eventually would be the removal from the promised land.

Or what about Ruth and the four other women who are listed here. The fact that they are even listed here is something to celebrate because it was unheard of to include women in the family genealogy at the time when Matthew was writing his Gospel. But there they are. And without them, without their bravery, without their courage, and yes without their willingness to break the rules a bit, the line of Israel would have ceased to exist long ago. Sounds like Disciples Women and past CWF circles if I do say so myself.

It's all right there in this list of people, telling us, showing us how God has worked through ordinary people, how God continues to work through ordinary people to bring about the Kingdom of God. This list of people of faith, our

ancestors, grounds the story of God into a larger narrative, a narrative which is so much more than the individual parts. It reminds the people, it reminds us that there is a promise given to us by our God, that no matter what, no matter the pain and hurt, no matter how many good or bad times we may experience along the way, we have a promise that God will always be there, guiding us, leading us, working to bring about the Kingdom of God for the people of God. And it is all right there in this list of people, in this sense of history, in this sense of connection which continues to define the people of God for years to come.

You see, Matthew is smart. From the very beginning of his Gospel, we know that this is a story. This is a story which started long ago. And this is a story which continues even now.

Matthew engages us as readers by playing on the wording a bit when he says that his Gospel is the beginning of the story of Jesus Christ. By using the word “beginning”, immediately, he draws us back...back to the beginning of the story of God’s people, back to the beginning of creation, back to the beginning when the earth was a dark and formless void and the Spirit moved over the waters and simply said...Let there be light.

Matthew wants us to remember that in the beginning, God created. Matthew wants us to remember that in our present moments, God is still creating. Matthew

wants us to remember that in the promised future, God will still be creating. Now and forevermore, God continues to create, God continues to work to bring about the Kingdom of God here on Earth for the people of God.

I'll admit that now would be a great time for a sermon illustration but for us as Midway Christian Church, our story is just getting started. Imagine what it will be like 175 years from now, when this community of faith gathers again to celebrate our 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Imagine the people. Imagine the stories. Imagine the connection they will feel to us, the ones sitting here today. Our story as Midway Christian Church is just getting started because as someone way smarter than me once told me, "Never forget that we are just one chapter in the story of this congregation. More will come along and write their narrative. But for now, as people of God, we have been given the call, the call to tell the old, old story of Jesus and his love, not just today but all days. We are called to tell the story of God's love to those who are forgotten. We are called to tell the story of God's grace to those who are pushed to the margins. We are called to the story so that this world will know that God love will always have the last word.

By telling of this story, we honor our past. By telling this story, we live in the present. By telling this story, we dream of a future where God's Kingdom will come on Earth as it is in heaven. Past, present and future, all come together for us as God's people, just by telling this powerful, life-changing story of God's love."

So since our story as Midway Christian Church is still being written, I will simply add the next chapter...in the beginning of the story of Midway Christian Church, there was a community of faith which gathered on Railroad Street in an unfinished Woolen Mill. Eventually they moved to 123 East Bruen street where two different structures were built, the first one was torn down because of disrepair and the second one is the one we are currently worshipping in today. Over the years, this community of faith has had its ups and downs over the years. It had the melodeon incident and the founding of Kentucky Female Orphan School. It has had its moment of conflict and struggles. But it has also had moments of great revivals and renewing fellowship. And through it all, this community of faith continues to become the people of Welcome God created and called them to be. 175 years in ministry and mission,

From the beginning in 1844, there are sixty two generations. From the beginning, there was and continues to be a community of faith, a community of faith filled with ordinary people, people who transform the world, all because they have joined their infinite hands, in service and love. Amen.