

Now Abraham was old, advanced in years, and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. ²Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his house, who had charge of all that he had, “Put your hand under my thigh, ³and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live, ⁴but will go to my country and to my kindred and get a wife for my son Isaac.” . . . ⁹So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter.

¹⁰Then the servant . . . set out and went to Aram-naharaim, to the city of Nahor. ¹¹He made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water; it was toward evening, the time when women go out to draw water. ¹²And he said, “O Lord, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. ¹³I am standing here by the spring of water, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. ¹⁴Let the young woman to whom I shall say, ‘Please offer your jar that I may drink,’ and who shall say, ‘Drink, and I will water your camels’—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master.”

¹⁵Before he had finished speaking, there was Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham’s brother, coming out with her water jar on her shoulder. ¹⁶The young woman was very fair to look upon, a virgin, whom no man had known. She went down to the spring, filled her jar, and came up. ¹⁷Then the servant ran to meet her and said, “Please let me sip a little water from your jar.” ¹⁸“Drink, my lord,” she said and quickly lowered her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink. ¹⁹When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, “I will draw for your camels also, until they have finished drinking.” ²⁰So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels. [The man and woman introduced themselves and he realized that she was from Abraham’s family line.] ²⁶The man bowed his head and worshiped the Lord ²⁷and said, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who

has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the Lord has led me on the way to the house of my master's kin."

[Then the young woman went home and told her family what had happened, and her brother went out and invited the man to come to their home. The servant explained his mission and retells the story of what happened at the well.]

⁵⁰ Then [her brother] Laban and [her father] Bethuel answered, "The thing comes from the Lord; we cannot speak to you anything bad or good. ⁵¹ Look, Rebekah is before you, take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has spoken."

⁵² When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the ground before the Lord. ⁵³ And the servant brought out jewelry of silver and of gold and garments and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave to her brother and to her mother costly ornaments. ⁵⁴ Then he and the men who were with him ate and drank, and they spent the night there. When they rose in the morning, he said, "Send me back to my master." ⁵⁵ Her brother and her mother said, "Let the young woman remain with us a while, at least ten days; after that she may go." ⁵⁶ But he said to them, "Do not delay me, since the Lord has made my journey successful; let me go that I may go to my master." ⁵⁷ They said, "We will call the young woman and ask her." ⁵⁸ And they called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" She said, "I will." . . . ⁶¹ Then Rebekah and her maids rose up, mounted the camels, and followed the man, and the servant took Rebekah and went his way.

⁶² Now Isaac had come from Beer-lahai-roi and was settled in the Negeb. ⁶³ Isaac went out in the evening to walk in the field, and, looking up, he saw camels coming. ⁶⁴ And Rebekah looked up, and when she saw Isaac, she slipped quickly from the camel ⁶⁵ and said to the servant, "Who is the man over there, walking in the field to meet us?" The servant said, "It is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself. ⁶⁶ And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. ⁶⁷ Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent. He took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

This is quite a detailed story. I edited it down as much as I felt I could, and it's still the longest passage I've ever read on a Sunday morning. There are so many specific details. It's an unusually long passage considering that Issac is really not a major character in Genesis. I could spend weeks talking about Issac and his troubles, Rebekah and her troubles, their children's troubles, but I need to move on. Next week is Rally Day, and I want to return to the lectionary texts in Luke as we begin the new program year, so this is my last chance, for a while, to talk about the dysfunctional family of God. I have to wrap this series up.

Now, typically, a sermon takes just a few verses and does a deep dive into them. But that's not what I'm about to do. Instead, I want to run through the entire Old Testament, from Genesis 12 where we met Abraham to Malachi 2 the last chapter. 2000 years or so of history. So, does anyone need to go to the restroom or get some coffee before we start?

Hold on, don't everybody leave at once!

I promise, we'll fly through it. I just want to demonstrate to you how dysfunctional this family of God is. We've spent 4 weeks on just two generations – Abraham, Sarah and Hagar, and their sons Ishmael and Issac. And I keep calling them a dysfunctional family. And it's not just because of what Abraham and Sarah got up to. The whole line is a mess. A soap opera family, a Jerry Springer family, an "I hope I was adopted" kind of family. Today, I want to run through 42 generations of the family of God and show you how crazy it is.

Do me a favor and open your pew Bible or your Bible app on your phone and find Matthew chapter 1. I need your help with this. When I pause and point to you, I want you to say, "he's (or she's) a part of the family of God."

As you can see, the very first name in this genealogy is Abraham. We know that rascal a little better now. He fathered Issac, but we know he also fathered Ishmael, an older son. That was messy. But . . . he's a part of the family of God.

When we began our journey with Abraham in chapter 12, he was seventy-five. He was eighty-six when Ishmael was born. He was one hundred when Issac was born, and he was one hundred and thirty-seven when Sarah died. Now he is one hundred and forty years old, and his desire to be a grandfather is strong. He wants to bounce a new generation on his knee.

And he has some specific instructions for his servant. "Find a wife by traveling to my family's hometown. Do NOT get a bride from among the Canaanites." He's adamant. So judgmental. Like the magical families in Harry Potter refusing to acknowledge the "mudbloods or muggles" - people of mixed magical ancestry or no magical ancestry. Or the United States before Loving V. Virginia in 1967 when interracial marriage was illegal. Very arrogant and very racist.

And so in our story today, the servant goes and finds Abraham's brother's family and brings Rebekah to Issac. Rebekah and Issac are first cousins once removed! I told you last week that the family of Abraham and the British monarchy had a lot in common! But still . . . Rebekah and Issac . . . they're a part of the family of God.

Then we have the next generation. Issac becomes the father of twins - Esau and Jacob. Jacob was the younger, and Jacob was a mama's boy. He and his mom deceived Issac and stole from Esau. That was brutal, but . . . he's a part of the family of God.

Jacob then ran to his uncle's house and wound up marrying two of his first cousins. He only wanted one, and everyone knew how he felt. That was really, really next level awkward.

Jacob, through his two wives and his two other baby mamas, fathered Judah and his eleven brothers. Judah and nine other brothers sold yet another brother, daddy's favorite, into slavery and pretended he had been killed. But remember this about Judah . . . he's a part of the family of God.

Now Judah had several children, but the ones listed in Matthew are the twins Perez and Zerah by Tamar. This is interesting. Tamar is the first woman listed in the genealogy. Even though we've learned about Sarah and Rebekah and Leah and Rachel. But here's Tamar - not because she was a super faithful and amazing woman. No. She was Judah's daughter-in-law. Son number one married her and died. Son number two married her and then died, and Judah said, live with my family and when my baby boy is older, you can marry him. But she felt her biological clock ticking so she disguised herself and Judah thought she was a prostitute and agreed to sleep with her, in exchange for a goat, and she had the twins. Guys . . . Judah is a part of the family of God. Tamar is a part of the family of God.

Then we have Hezron, Aram, Aminadab, Nahshon, and Salmon. And again, it gets interesting because it says "Salmon is the father of Boaz by Rahab." Rahab is the second woman in the genealogy. Again, not the most noble or righteous. Rahab is a Canaanite woman, exactly the kind of woman Abraham did not want for his son. And she is a prostitute, living in Jerico, and she protects the two Israelite spies who have come to scope out the city and find any weaknesses. When the city is sacked, she and her family are spared, and she marries Salmon and has Boaz. What do we say about Rahab the Canaanite prostitute? . . . She's a part of the family of God.

We learn more about her son Boaz in the book of Ruth. Ruth is a Moabite woman. She married into a family of Israelites. When her husband and her father-in-law and her brother-in-law all pass away, her mother-in-law, Naomi, tells her to go back to her family, but Ruth famously says, "Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God." What do we say about the foreigner Ruth? . . . She's a part of the family of God.

Ruth gets her own book in the Bible, and she gets to marry Boaz, and they have a son named Obed. Obed is one-quarter Israelite, descended from Abraham, one quarter Canaanite, and one-half Moabite. Not at all a pure-blood and watch what happens next.

Obed has a son named Jesse, and then Jesse has a son named David. David. That David. King David. The David who killed the giant and played the harp and brought peace to the people and worshipped God. And the same David who raped a married woman and had her husband killed. That David.

Are you with me so far?

That's why the genealogy in Matthew 1 says, David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah. Even in the genealogy, David, the greatest king in the history of Israel, is listed as a man whose sins are remembered. What a complicated story, but remember this about David, he's a part of the family of God.

Solomon was king of Israel, too, even though he was not the oldest son of David. And he did some good things, but he also left a mess behind. His sons immediately had a civil war and divided the country into two halves which never reunited.

I'm sure you all know the stories of the men listed in the next section of the genealogy. Rehoboam and Abijah, Asaph, and Jehoshaphat. (Side note, I was in a children's choir in 5th grade, and we did a whole musical about Jehoshaphat. Andy, if you're interested, I'll find my notes.)

Then there's Joram and Uzziah, Jotham and Ahaz. Now Ahaz is a bad, bad man. Too bad to get into here but trust me, and yet . . . he's a part of the family of God.

Then there's Hezekiah, he's good, and his son Manasseh, he's bad. Manasseh is quite evil. Among other things he is said to have had his maternal grandfather, Isaiah, the prophet Isaiah, sawed in half. Manasseh . . . is a part of the family of God.

Then we get to Josiah, who was good, and then Jechoniah was involved in the Babylonian exile. At that point, the upper class who survived was uprooted. They were marched across the desert and lived in Babylon for between 50 and 60 years. Then some were able to return and rebuild Jerusalem.

We don't know much about the next fourteen generations, except that they culminate in Joseph, husband of Mary, mother of Jesus.

Each one of these characters and all the unnamed mothers and sisters and brothers are part of the family of God. Each one, good or bad, some both good and bad, their DNA made Joseph who he was. Their family quirks, their physical characteristics, their medical conditions, their traditions all passed down through the years.

The family of God is messy. It is of mixed races and mixed faiths. It contains those who humbled themselves and those who were arrogant. It contains women who were both brave and desperate. It contains kings and carpenters and con-men and murderers.

So when I look around at the world today and see how embarrassing some Christians are, I realize, they're at home in the family of God. When people ask themselves if they are good enough to be accepted by God, I point to this genealogy and say, you're so much better than a dozen of these creeps! If any holier than thou thinks they can say that God doesn't have a place for you in heaven because of how you vote or dress or love or pray, I defy them to justify how this family remained in God's covenantal relationship.

It is absolutely amazing to me that we read so much about this one family. That their story gets to be 2/3rds of our scripture texts. They are wacky. They are ick. They are us. We are them.

Father Abraham has many kids in his family tree. Far more than the ones we heard about today, because we didn't get all the daughters and wives and other sons. I am one of them, and so are you, so let's all praise the Lord! Right arm! Left arm! Right foot! Left foot! Turn around! Sit down! Amen!

Matthew 1 An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

²Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram, ⁴and Aram the father of Aminadab, and Aminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶and Jesse the father of King David.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, ⁷and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, ⁸and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, ⁹and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, ¹⁰and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, ¹¹and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

¹²And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel, and Salathiel the father of Zerubbabel, ¹³and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, ¹⁴and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, ¹⁵and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, ¹⁶and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, who bore Jesus, who is called the Messiah.

¹⁷So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.