

In the name of God-Father, Son & Holy Spirit. Amen

My wife and children think my taste runs to schmaltz. I don't understand this, but they base it apparently on the fact that among my fondest memories is seeing Mary Martin fly as Peter Pan on Broadway 50 odd years ago, my firm belief that the Sound of Music should appear at least once a week on TV, without commercial interruption, and that I truly miss The Waltons, Good night John-boy, and all that. My grandchildren, Olivia and Harris, and my cat, Louise, are not so judgmental. They understand that my taste runs to what is termed, in today's culture, family values. Well we just heard, from Genesis, another one of those comforting family values stories of our own ancestral family.

If you look at the genealogical table in the first chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, you will see that Judah was the great grandfather of David, and that there were 34 generations from Judah to Jesus. Now Matthew's geneology was set down before either the Mormon archives or the Internet, but his point is well taken, that Jesus is of royal descent and the fulfillment of Israel's dream of a messiah. And if Judah was Jesus' great grandfather, and we are followers of the risen Christ today, then we too are descendants of Judah. A bit tortured? Sure, but again the point is well taken. This is family, albeit it at times on the dysfunctional side.

I am the oldest of five children, but I never tried to sell my brother or any of

my sisters into slavery. Nor have I ever conspired with my brother and my two older sisters to sell the youngest, Betsy. Yet that's just what happened in our family values story today. By the way, as I have noted before and will say again, Bible reading is addictive, not unlike eating peanuts. If this story today of Joseph and his jealous brothers intrigues you, blow the dust off your bible at home and try the whole Joseph story in one sitting, Chapters 37-50 of Genesis. It's pretty compelling stuff, much of it adult stuff too. In a small book of Bible stories I used to read with my boys when they were little, there was a picture of old Jacob, leading his son Joseph by the hand, with Joseph, maybe six or seven years old, pulling a toy camel on wheels. My son Will saw immediately that Jacob was taking Joseph to school and it was show and tell day.

In truth Joseph is 17 when we first encounter him in Scripture, the child of a third marriage and by far the youngest. To his older brothers he is a little twerp. He is his father's favorite and he knows it. He many not know what he will be when he grows up, but he knows his brothers will end up working for him, and he lets them know it. He also wears a colorful royal robe his father gave him, and expects his brothers to bow down and salute when he passed by.

Well the lads finally had enough, so they decided to kill him, dispose of the body, and then tell their father Jacob that a wild animal got him. Fortunately the boys were not all of one mind in their diabolical scheme. Reuben put a stop to it

and made them settle for throwing Joseph down a well. Then Judah suggested they haul him out and sell him to some Ishmaelite traders, which they did, for 20 pieces of silver, perhaps the same as the 40 pieces of silver Judas got for betraying Jesus centuries later, adjusted for inflation. Then they dipped Joseph's coat in goat's blood and showed it to their father, as evidence that something terrible must have happened to Joseph. It broke the old man's heart of course. The story ends in an upbeat fashion, for Joseph, years later and in a position of some authority at the Egyptian court, is at last restored to his father and his brothers, and saves them from famine and worse. All that is for another day, but Joseph forgave his brothers, though it had been difficult, for Joseph was human. The worst thing anyone ever did to me was far less than what was done to Joseph, and yet I broke no speed records for forgiveness, dragging my feet big time. Joseph may have experienced what I have, that forgiveness sure is liberating, and powerfully so. Few moments in Scripture evoke such an automatic Wow as that when Joseph reveals himself to his brothers in Egypt, "I am your brother Joseph." And, at the end of the Book of Joshua, we read that the bones of Joseph were brought out of Egypt and buried in the promised land. When that saintly man John XXIII met with a group of rabbis in Rome, he threw open his arms and said "I am your brother Joseph." Again, wow.

Remember, these folks are no less than our family, making this our story. As is the 105th Psalm we read from moments ago, part of the hymnal of Israel. We

see there that God arranged all this, that God summoned famine against the land, but in order to save the children of Israel, he sent a man ahead of them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave. He was shackled and chained, “until what he had said came to pass.” Joseph of course was not alone in wearing chains and handcuffs. Jesus, Paul, and many others did too. It happens in the best of families, our own. Remember though that the story of Joseph being sold into captivity by his own brothers is critical to our own faith history. Connecting the dots, somewhat loosely to be sure, we have Joseph in Egypt in a position to rescue Israel from famine, but that very effort drew the children of Israel into Egypt, serving as an alien population there, so that when there came to power later on a new pharaoh who knew not Joseph, Moses and the others were there to fight for truth, justice, and the Hebrew way. All that being of course a precursor to the Exodus, and the conquest of the land, when they brought with them the bones of Joseph, and the settlement in what is now Israel and Palestine, punctuated by frequent war (What else is new?), and on and on until Jesus’ direct ancestor David is on the throne. So you see this is all tied together in Matthew’s genealogy, in which there may be a bit of poetic license. It’s a bit like the apostolic succession of which we are understandably proud. Jesus selected, ordained as it were, Peter, traditionally the first bishop of the Church, Peter ordained others, and so on to the 21st century. Now we can certainly go back the better part of 500 years. Bishop Keyser ordained me, and we know who ordained him, and we know who ordained

the bishops who ordained him, and so on, but surely there are gaps in the long white line so to speak, perhaps in Tudor England, in the break with Rome, perhaps earlier, or if not gaps exactly, a lack of documentation due to fire and other natural and political disasters. It's still a nice thought though and likely more solid than Matthew's genealogy. We aren't talking exact science though, but rich symbolic history. Jesus ordained Peter and Frank Vest ordained Anne, in a symbolically unbroken line. And Judah and Reuben, who were complicit in Joseph's seeming teenage tragedy, yet in a way save his life that he might save theirs later, are our direct spiritual ancestors. So these tales of family values are tales of our family.

That means that the Gospel account from Matthew, of Jesus walking on the water, is our own story too. Now please don't go off into a western 21st century scientific analysis of this wonderful story of the miracle of walking on water. It appears in Matthew and Mark, not Scientific American. Today's press, it has been suggested, would likely headline it Jesus Can't Swim. And then there's always been the sandbar explanation, but Peter sure missed that sandbar, didn't he? Don't suggest levitation either. Our rector wrote in the last newsletter that she was complicit in levitation at slumber parties awhile back, but she's preaching next Sunday. No, we must take this story as Matthew gives it to us, in awe and wonder.

Part of the fascination the sea holds for us is its mystery and its infinite danger. The sea today is as dangerous as when Paul sailed the eastern Mediterranean. In the lifetime of many of us here, more Allied ships were lost to the typhoon at Okinawa than to the Japanese. A submarine skipper I knew had a plaque on his stateroom wall, "O Lord thy sea is so great and my boat is so small." That Jesus could control the sea and bid its tumults cease, in the words of the hymn, was nothing short of divinely miraculous, if that isn't redundant. No wonder his contemporaries and followers asked themselves "Who is this Jesus of Nazareth, that even the winds and the seas obey him?" Peter and the other fishermen in the boat answered that question, without hesitation and from their hearts, for them and for us today, for all time to come, "truly you are the Son of God."

Amen.

St. Luke's

10 August 2008