**“Jesus: Son of Scandal”**

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Matthew 1:1,3, 5-6

 Advent Midweek – Son of Scandal

From Matthew, chapter 1: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham … Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, … and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king. And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah.”

In the name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Shannon LaNier is a television news anchor in Houston, But he’s also known for being the fifth great-grandson of Madison Hemings, a son of scandal. Like many family trees, LaNier’s family had a scandal in its past, and this scandal was a skeleton in the closet of one of our nation’s founding fathers.

On July 4th of 1826, fifty years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, its author (Thomas Jefferson) died after months of failing health. His contributions to the new and challenged nation were many. Architecture, agriculture, law, and educate were just a few of Jefferson’s diverse interests. He would bear the titles of governor, congressman, secretary of state, vice president, and eventually president. Both the Louisiana Purchas and Lew and Clark’s expedition would happen during his administration. His gravestone only notes his authorship of the Declaration of Independence and the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom and his being the “father of the University of Virginia, but Thomas Jefferson was one the founders of our nation, and left a legacy that remains to this day through the principles embedded within the Declaration of Independence.

But in recent years, Thomas Jefferson has also been remembered for scandal. After the death of his wife, Martha, Jefferson began a relationship with one of his slaves, Sally Hemings. There relationship would yield four children, one was Madison Hemings, Shannon LaNier’s forebear. All of Sally Hemings adult children were eventually freed by Jefferson; the last two at his death, but the author of the most famous document defending freedom for years kept enslaved most all his life those who were his own flood. Thomas Jefferson is a flawed hero, in other words, remembered for both great accomplishments but also scandal.

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One of the most striking features of Jesus’ genealogy St. Matthew records is his inclusion of women in it. Most Jewish genealogies didn’t include women in the list. More importantly, the women included weren’t the great matriarchs Sara, Rebekah, and Leah, but Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the wife of Uriah. Matthew wanted to give us more than just biological information … but theological notes.

The four women Matthew accounts show us what kind of God our heavenly Father is. This is God’s revelation about Himself and His Son and His plan of salvation. But including these four women in the list, God’s revealed as leaving no one out in the extension of His grace.

Tamar’s husband had been killed by the Lord for his evil, and Judah didn’t provide her another husband, so she turned to prostitution, conceiving twins from her own father-in-law … one in the lineage to the Christ. Rahab had been the prostitute in Jericho keeping Israelite spies safe as they surveyed the city. She, too, was ancestor to the Savior. Ruth was from Moab (a foreigner), grafted into the Messianic line but only through marriage, and David’s relationship with Bathsheba was one of infidelity, she birthing a second son after the one from adultery, Solomon would fall in line to the Lord’s birth. A family tree of incest, prostitution, adultery, and murder God would use as the execution of His plan of salvation. He’d save sinners lost without it.

3

Thomas Jefferson’s descendants had actually been plunged into controversy over the revelation Sally Heming’s children were fathered by him. When that family gathers, they have to wonder who’s who and welcome as family. People have to wonder whether or not we’re welcome in the family of God, worthy for such by lineage. But the women of Jesus lineage tell of God’s mercy, and not the merits of the women themselves. “They’re firmly enmeshed in the history of God’s chosen people” an author wrote, “and their presence speaks eloquently of the fact that this history is not the story of the glory of man, but of the grace of God”.

And scandal’s not just something we can find within the deeds of ancestors. **Ours are the sins of scandal**. **We show** (too often) that **we’re** too far estranged from God, that **we’re** prodigal sons and daughters rejecting the Father in heaven and the family faith puts us in. **We’ve** opted for temporary pleasures rather than the righteousness of God. **We’ve** contaminated the family name, no better (so often) than Tamar and Rahab and Ruth and Bathsheba and David …

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… yet **we received the Spirit of adoption as sons and daughters by baptism. God’s granted to us to be children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”**

1

Family reunions often appreciate the genealogies of family. God’s invite of us to those reunions as His family is no different. Yet we recognize that we join with other liars, cheats, thieves, adulterers, murderers, con artists and addicts, the arrogant and the ignorant, the hardheaded and the hard-nosed, the greedy and the needy, the college student worried about a future and the grown haunted by the past. The family is of all types with warts and bruises and scandals and skeletons yet forgiven and renewed when repentant, one family by Jesus’ death and resurrection for us received by faith as we, together, look forward to the reunion in heaven. There we get what we’ve never earned … but what we’re given by Jesus’ blood and God’s grace.

Jesus died for His family’s scandal on the tree of the cross, and those scandals in His earthly lineage show us **the grace by which He makes also us heirs and family**. What a blessing, then, it is to be shown Tamar and Rahab and Ruth and Bathsheba’s inclusion in the family tree. **ALL THE SCANDLOUS** **but redeemed and sorry for their sins** are **granted God’s grace and family inheritance as gift**. Thanks be to God, in Jesus’ name. Amen.