

ADVENT MIDWEEK 3 2020

TEXT: MATTHEW 1: 1, 3, 5-6

THEME: JESUS: SON OF SCANDAL

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram **5** and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, **6** and Jesse the father of David the king. And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah.

In the name of Jesus:

Shannon LaNier is a television news anchor in Houston, the seventh-largest television market in the United States. But he's also known for being the fifth great-grandson of Madison Hemings, a son of scandal. Like so 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 4, 1826, fifty years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, its author, Thomas Jefferson, died after months of failing health. Jefferson had made accomplishments and contributed a great deal to the newly constituted United States of America. Architecture, agriculture, law, and education were just a few of Jefferson's diverse interests. He served the public as a governor, congressman, secretary of state, vice president, and eventually president. Both the Louisiana Purchase and Lewis and Clark's

expedition would happen during his administration. His gravestone only mentions that he was the author of the Declaration of Independence and the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom and his being the “father of the University of Virginia.” Thomas Jefferson was one of the founding fathers of our nation.

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. Their relationship would yield four children who lived into adulthood, one of whom was Madison Hemings, Shannon LaNier’s forebear. All of Sally Hemings’s adult children were eventually freed by Jefferson, the last two at his death. The author of the most famous document defending freedom for years enslaved those who were his own blood. In classic American form, Thomas Jefferson is the flawed hero, remembered for both his great accomplishments and scandal.

One of the most striking features of Jesus’ genealogy as recorded by St. Matthew is the inclusion of women. Most Jewish genealogies did not include women. What is interesting is that Matthew chose to highlight certain women. He didn’t say anything about the great matriarchs as Sarah, Rebekah, and Leah.

The four women that Matthew mentions shows the love God has for all people. He chooses four women, women of scandal, to show that no one is beyond the grace of God.

Just note the scandals alluded to in Matthew's genealogy. Tamar's husband had been killed by the Lord because of his evil ways. Judah did not keep his promise to Tamar to provide her another husband, so she disguised herself as a harlot and conceived twins with her own father-in-law, now a widower, Judah. One of those twins would be an ancestor of Christ. Rahab had been a prostitute in Jericho who kept the Israelite spies in safety as they surveyed the city before taking possession of the Promised Land. But Rahab would also become an ancestor of the Savior to come. Ruth was from Moab, a Gentile who became grafted into the messianic line. Even David's illicit relationship with Bathsheba would lead to a second son, Solomon, and David's own King and Lord. Just note the scandals that are a part of Jesus' family tree: incest, prostitution, adultery, and murder. Talk about reality television!

Thomas Jefferson's descendants have been plunged into controversy over the revelation that Sally Hemings's children were fathered by the former president. When the family gathers together, who is welcome? Who is legitimate? Who should be considered illegitimate? Those questions plague

more than just the Jefferson family. Every person must wonder whether she or he is worthy to be called a child of God and part of his family. But we don't have to wonder about inclusion into God's family. All are saved by grace through faith in Christ. Saved by grace, through faith.

Our life is marked by scandal, in that our own actions have estranged us from God. We are all prodigal sons and daughters who have rejected our father and our family of faith. We have sold our birthright for our insatiable appetite for sin. We have not hungered and thirst for righteousness. Instead, we have sought to fill ourselves with the temporary pleasures of what this world offers. For we, too, were once enemies of Christ. Our gods are what we set our eyes on. In reality, we are no better than Judah or Tamar, Rahab or Ruth, Bathsheba or David, for we share in their humanity and their sin.

But God has adopted us as His children. And if we are children of God, then we are His heirs, and fellow heirs with Christ. As St. Paul wrote to Titus, "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared"—the goodness and loving kindness that caused Jesus to go to the cross—"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” (Titus 3:4–7). In the waters of Baptism each of us has been made God’s child, and in Baptism God says to each of us: “you are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (Mk 1:11).

Family reunions are known for its celebrations and for its food. By the grace of God, we have been invited to the great banquet. For we are the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind on account of our sin. But see what kind of love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are. Therefore, by his grace, God has even welcomed us to the marriage feast of the Lamb in his kingdom, which has no end. At this family reunion, there are people from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages.

But it is a family reunion unlike any other when you consider who is a part of this family. Liars, cheats, thieves, adulterers, murderers, and meddlers. Con artists and addicts. The arrogant and the ignorant. Hardheaded and hard-nosed. The greedy and needy. College students paralyzed by fear of the future and grown adults haunted by the ghosts of the past. This family takes all kinds. All kinds of people with all their warts and bruises and scandals and skeletons and other things from their pasts. We are all one family in Christ,

united through Jesus' death and resurrection as we look forward to this blessed reunion in heaven with those who have gone before us. This is the inheritance to which we can look forward. It is never earned, but only given by the grace of God.

Studying family genealogy can be a fascinating endeavor for people. But learning about Jesus' tree is not just a moving experience. It is life! For we have been adopted into this family and made heirs of the glorious inheritance that is eternal life. Jesus' family tree is our family tree, for ultimately, our family tree is the tree of Calvary on which he died for all his family. And The Scandals of Jesus' Family Tree Show Us That We, Too, Are Children of God by His Grace and Therefore Heirs of Heaven. During this Advent season, what a blessing it is to remember that, like Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba, we are all part of this family by God's grace.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.