

“What’s Going On?”

7th Sunday after The Epiphany – Feb 24, 2019 – Gen 45:3-15 & Luke 6:27-38/C

There is a hot trend nowadays for those of us who enjoy genealogy. The trend is to have your DNA tested, so that you can determine your family’s origin and ethnicity. First offered to members of sites like Ancestry.com, now there are any number of places and reasons you might wish to have this information. It is a remarkable journey, to go about *Finding Your Roots*, as is the premise of the PBS show that assists celebrities and public figures with these journeys. Recently, comic Sarah Silverman was on that journey with the host, Henry Gates, Jr. As she was presented with pictures and documents of ancestors she had never met, she came across a portrait of her great-great grandfather, the immigrant. There he was, seated among a gaggle of children and across from his wife. They all looked very stern, as if the camera were a foreign object itself. But as she connected with the faces that had hints of other family members, she remarked, *“I just want to get in there with them and ask them, “What’s going on?”*

Since Advent, we have been “knit into” Luke’s family story, hearing our Christian family history from those who passed it on beginning more than 2,000 years ago. Actually, we are not so different, as we experience **current** cultural shifts in religion and politics in our time – Empires rise, empires fall – and we may have realized that we are not so far removed from our ancestors in the faith. And, you gotta love our guide, Luke, for choosing themes of liberation and the Holy Spirit in action in both his Book I (The Gospel of Luke) and Book II (The Acts of the Apostles.) So, today might be a good time for you to begin to hear Luke with different ears. Ears that are listening for the human experiences beyond just the familiar Christmas story and the most famous parable of Jesus that only Luke seems to know, and the we recognize as The Prodigal Son. Ears that draw us into the portraits presented by Luke and his cast, to ask them, ***What’s going on?***

The more things change the more they are the same. (Or to quote Karr more accurately, “the more things change the more they continue to become the same.”) For, by the end of the book of Acts, the status is pretty much quo. While the disciples’ lives have been transformed by their time and experiences with Jesus, they are still living in a land occupied by the Roman Empire, and Jesus’ Resurrection doesn’t seem to have changed that one single bit. Much like their ancestors in the faith, Christians are **still** trying to live the Kingdom of God in midst of religious, economic and political upheaval.

So, now might be a good time to check in and ask, *What is the Bible?* Good Lutherans will respond, “It is the inspired Word of God!” Yep. Yes, it is. But there are as many other answers as there are folks in the room: It is history! (His Story, I was told in Sunday School); It is The Book of Faith; It is a Book of Do’s/Don’ts; It is God’s Little Instruction Book. And Jesus said: *“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.”* To which we might respond, ***“What’s in it for me?”*** Let’s return to Sarah Silverman, and consider getting into the portraits of the people of the Bible. Let’s ask them, ***“What’s going on?”*** How? In our Wed @ One Bible conversation group that is currently “Questioning Luke,” we are finding ways to use the Bible as a sort of portal to God – a time machine – a worm hole, that allows us to get into the picture in a new way, to ask questions about the place, the situation -- then hear how God related to the people who knew him personally -- through Jesus. As we become part of what’s going on between God and them, we can better **translate** God into our lives. We can begin to see ***what’s going on with them***, that is also ***going on with us*** today. And once we make that connection to God through them and their witness, we can learn how to connect others to God through our own.

So what good is God's Story to Us? Well, it is sort of like discovering who we are through our DNA. Let me illustrate using the lesson from the end of Genesis this morning – the last act of the familiar story of Joseph and the Coat of Many Colors. Let me remind you of the highlights: Joseph had 11 other brothers, and most of them didn't like him. So, one day they threw him in a pit; sold him into slavery in Egypt and lied to their Dad that he had been killed by wild animals. Meanwhile, Joseph rose through Pharaoh's ranks by his charm and intelligence (and interpretation of dreams) and Pharaoh put him in charge of Disaster Response for the coming famine. When the famine came; his family of brothers were forced to come to Egypt to buy food. (lots more details in Genesis Chapters 44-46, if you want the whole story...)

When the brothers were called to task for past misdeeds: they were terrified of what might be their punishment. But it was even worse than they imagined when Joseph revealed who he was. And then, he forgave them. Surprise! At the end of the story it says, "*And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that, his brothers talked with him.*" (Imagine that table!)

Is this **not** a story that hits us where we live? Have we not had family feuds that kept us from the table – even from one another completely - as if our withdrawal would punish their misdeed? Now, imagine the relief and joy around a table where a family is reconciled and finds their way back to belonging again. Their wounds are healed, their fears erased. They are whole. So, what's goin' on in Joseph's family portrait? Is it a group shot with one missing person? Is it a reminder of all the times we put ourselves over one another to **judge**, to **condemn**, to **defend**, to **protect**?

Or, could it be a different portrait, say, the one we see as we stand right next to Joseph and hear Jesus saying: *Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.*

This is where our family history gets real. Our ancestors heard Mary sing her song of freedom. They were there when Jesus preached his first sermon from the prophet Isaiah and they followed him to where he taught them from a level place, (not from a mountain.) They understood what it meant to be brought low, or to be lifted up. And so do we. Because sharing love with the whole world is in our DNA. We like to think we don't know how to share the good news, that we don't really know what to say or do. We like to say we don't understand the Bible, but, we really just don't want to do what it advises: Level the playing field. Let go of your power so another's hope can flourish. Let something in you die so new life can begin.

That's what's going on, in the family of God. Amen.

Pastor Susan Langhauser
Advent Lutheran Church, Olathe, KS
7th Sunday after the Epiphany

Resources: Matt Skinner on Luke – Working Preacher.com; Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr, quote in Les Guêpes, January 1849, "*the more things **change**, the more they continue to be the **same** thing,*" usually translated as "*the more things **change**, the more they **stay the same**.*"