

Text: Matthew 1.16
St Stephen's

Dec 24th, 2008
Christmas Eve

Let Me Introduce You...

I wonder if you know anything about **Facebook**, that internet site where people connect in networks based on friendships or shared interests. It is a phenomenon in modern life. My kids are on it all the time. If you have a facebook page, you can '**friend**' someone (I love that verb), they can decide if they want to friend you back – and if you do, that gives you access to each other's facebook pages. You can have lots of friends like this – or few! **You choose**. Isn't this fun!

Your friends have access to something called your **Wall** – a space where you can introduce yourself and can post messages for any of your friends to see. Your friends can '**poke**' you (a little window appears on your screen and tells you that a friend has poked you) and if you want they can even **track your movements** during the day, knowing where you are and what you are doing. But **you control** who sees what.

The network has become so popular – over 140M people are using this, and this facebook network which started as a college project is now valued at over \$1B – it is so popular that many workplaces have **banned it**, because everyone is **always tracking and poking** their friends all day long! We haven't banned it at St Stephens, because **I didn't even know about it!!** I was thinking about joining it – and all my kids immediately threatened to resign from it! Hmmm!!! I think I will join this month!

In a modern world, it is a great way of finding folks you have lost track of, of introducing yourself to people, and of keeping old friendships going.

Both Matthew and Luke start their gospels with **an introduction to Jesus**. It is **an ancient facebook wall** where photos and messages are posted, but it is **written in a language** that sounds strange to modern ears. That is because their introduction is **a genealogy**.

I want to look at Jesus' facebook page with you tonight, and see if we

can't crack the secret code of an ancient language and get a fresh glimpse of who he is and why he came.

Matthew posts this sentence at the top of his page...

This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of David and of Abraham

Matthew 1.1

It is quite a record! Matthew lists three sets of fourteen families, about **42 in all**, tracing the lineage of Jesus in **three successive steps** - first from Abraham to David, then from David to the exile in Babylon, then from the exile to the birth in Bethlehem. To an ancient Jew this was important stuff. Your lineage said **who** you were, **where** you came from, **what** you were made of. Your lineage was your introduction to the world, an ancient facebook page.

A Surprising List of Names

Dig into the list and you notice some **surprises**:

- For starters we have a long list of **failed leaders**
 - We start with **Abraham**; he was the father of this nation. But when you look at the post under his name you find that he had this habit of lying to save his skin! (Gen. 12:10–20).
 - Then we meet his grandson **Jacob**; he cheated his brother, lied to his father, got conned and then conned his uncle (Genesis 27, 29).
 - You wouldn't miss the picture of **King David** himself, and you sure wouldn't miss the photo **Bathsheba**, who knew exactly who was looking from the King's palace when she bathed naked on her rooftop – after the adultery and murder of her husband, they had a son, **Solomon**. And all three of them are in Jesus' facebook wall.
 - **Rahab's** there; she was a harlot (Josh. 2:1). **Ruth's** there. She was a gentile (Ruth 1:4).
 - It seems that almost half the kings were crooks, half embezzlers, and to add to it, all but a handful worshiped an idol or two.

It is a surprising list of names!!!

- Don't miss the **unusual women in the lineup**: It is **not normal** to find the names of women in Jewish genealogies at all. But here in the lineage of Jesus we find the names of **four women!** And they are not the women you would expect in the lineage of Jesus. Jews had four **matriarchs**: Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah. Each of their husbands was named in Jesus lineage, and Matthew could have selected their names – but he chose **four others** for his list: Ruth, Tamar, Rahab and Bathsheba. All of whom were gentiles, and all of whom were caught in heartbreaking difficulty or scandal. They would become **matriarchs of his mercy**. It is an **unusual** list.
- And you wouldn't miss the names of at least four **Gentiles on Jesus' facebook page**. Maybe this was the greatest surprise of all. Jews believed that **racial purity** was a guardian of **spiritual purity**, that the **container** protected the **content**. And there are these outsider Gentiles!! Four of them. This is not good!! **No Jew would have missed** their photos. But **Matthew posted them, carefully**.

So here in this famous introduction to Jesus, Matthew lists failed leaders and unusual women and gentile outsiders. This is **not a list you would brag about**, not if you were trying to make a good impression. But there they are, because **this is the way it happened**. You think about that and it begins to dawn upon you; this facebook page is saying something, something quite remarkable. Let me put it in **three brief thoughts**:

1) Matthew's List Is Not So Unusual

We know people like this, lots of them. Pick up your newspaper. Turn on the evening news. Or better yet, just pick **any 42 people who you know well**. Any list will do, I think. Wouldn't you see Matthew's list there as well? When was the last time you attended a **family gathering**? Or think about the people on the **floor of your dorm in college**. Think about **40 or 50 people you work with** every day.

Don't people everywhere tell the same story? Isn't everyone a mixture of **something remarkable** and **something broken**? Aren't we? Aren't you? There is **enough dignity** in every life to raise the head of the poorest beggar – and there is **enough brokenness** to stoop the shoulders of the proudest king.

Here is my second thought...

2) Matthew's List Has a Final Name

*Joseph was the husband of Mary,
and Mary was the mother of Jesus.
Jesus is called the Christ.*

Matthew 1:16

Matthew's facebook page is saying something astounding – that all this history, all these twists and turns and ups and downs – these 42 names from Abraham to David to Joseph... it has all been **heading somewhere**. And that somewhere – actually that **someone** - has **now arrived**. You can almost hear his point as you near the end of his 42 generation wall...

*Eliud had Eleazar,
Eleazar had Matthan,
Matthan had Jacob,
Jacob had Joseph, Joseph was the husband of Mary, and Mary
was the mother of Jesus. Jesus is called the Christ.*

There you have it. You have **come to the point** of 4 thousand years of human history. It has all been careening towards this one baby, this **special baby**. You can read it in **the names** that are given to this special baby. Joseph has a dream in which he is told by an angel...

"you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

"and people shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us)

Matthew 1.21-23

Joseph is to give him the name, "**Jesus**" - literally a name that means, "God saves". God rescues. God sets free. Not yet from all the brokenness around us – but **first from the brokenness inside us, 'from our sins'**. That's where God starts. That is a **very good place to start.**

People on Matthew's kind of list flocked to Jesus, loved to get near to him. And he loved to get near to them. People came to him in the heat of the day and in the secret hours of the night. Little children, and blind men, and desperate parents... sexually broken people and stressed out people -- they all sought him out.

Joseph is told that **the people** would call him "**Emmanuel**". God with us. And they did. Not the 'God's-going-to-get-us' god. Not the 'God's-going-to-get-them' god. But the "God-with-us" god. It began to dawn on people that this was exactly what was happening. That he was someone who was a man but **far more than a man**, someone who ...

healed, what would not heal...

forgave the unforgiven...

freed those who were trapped...

brought home those who had lost their way...

And he was someone **who loved them** like they had never been loved before. '**Jesus**', and '**Emmanuel**', are the names **at the end of Matthew's list.**

3) Matthew's List Has a Missing Name

all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

Matthew 1.17

Careful students of the bible have noticed something strange about Matthew's list. He lays out Jesus' genealogy in 3 sets of 14. Except that the final set is only 13 names long. **There is a missing name**, and scholars have pondered that for a long time.

I have a thought on the missing name. **I think the missing name is your name.** I think Matthew could count, and knew what he was doing - and I think Matthew is saying that he came for people just like this – just like you and me.

To say it in our facebook language – **he has 'friended' you.** It is something to be **friended by the Son of God** – he has **come a long way** to friend you. A very long way.

You have some people out there, some of those 42 people you live and work with. Could you **tell them that Jesus has friended** them? That he is **specially fond** of them? That he has **come a long way** just to be with them?

And could you **friend him back** tonight. You yourself? Open up the walls of your life and welcome him in, this God saves us, God with us Friend – the one whose birth we celebrate tonight.

I've asked Kacia and Robert to bring a **special song** tonight as part of my message. It's **an Emmanuel song** called 'Here with Us'. When they sing, maybe you could **whisper your answer** to him. Just a simple "yes, Lord Jesus, me too" will be heard.