

Grace and peace to you my friends and fellow sojourners from Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Each of the four gospels in the Bible begin entirely differently on their way to telling the story of God's love for us in Jesus. Does anyone know which of the gospels begins with the genealogy of Jesus? Matthew? Yep, you got that right although, on the one hand, it could have been a pretty obvious choice. Anyone care to tell us why Matthew starts with Jesus' genealogy? I would say because Matthew's focus for his gospel is on the identity and authority of Jesus. This genealogy is listed in three groups of 14 generations. There are 14 generations from Abraham to David, and another 14 generations from David to the exile, and finally, another 14 generations from the exile to Jesus. So why is this genealogy so important for the writer of the Gospel of Matthew that it is the first thing out of the gate? Is it because it is a defined and recognized way to establish identity? For instance, the introduction to the Gospel of Matthew in one of my study Bibles says: "Matthew's message is clear: Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, the King of kings and Lord of lords." And Jesus' genealogy is a clear and strong indicator of **Jesus'** identity.

I think it is pretty easy to say that in some way or another all of our readings today speak to authority and how people **respond** to authority. I think it is also true that for many of us, authority does follow closely to identity. Our identity can be established round who we are or who our ancestors were, you know, the long-line of breeding and money. This is probably the **main** reason the Gospel of Matthew begins with a long genealogy.

But there are also many other ways we and our society determine identity and, therefore, authority. In the military we used rank structures to determine authority. In other institutions, authority may come with degrees or position, or seniority, or a combination of factors. And there are, of course, people who just have an "air" or the voice of authority. There is, in fact, a gospel reference indicating Jesus had **these** traits as well.

In our Ezekiel reading today, we are hearing snippets of argument between God and the exiles. In essence the exiles have taken an old proverb and applied it to their current situation, by blaming their ancestors for **their** current demise. This is, in a way, an acknowledgement of the ancient Israelite understanding of intergenerational guilt. Yes, there may be some truth in what they say but ultimately blaming others lets them ignore their **own** complicity and obscure the particulars of the current emergency. How can or does this apply to current situations in our country and in our world? Unlike the struggles of the Israelites, can we find ways to get beyond the blaming the sin of our ancestors and acknowledge our complicity, our need for forgiveness, and then simply let it go, or as God says – cast it away – and accept forgiveness. In verse 4 of our Ezekial reading, God emphatically declares ownership when God says: “**Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die.**” And then comes Jesus.

I remember on September 9th sitting at a bar by our gate in the Honolulu airport, trying to watch a particular college football game. One of my brothers-in-law grabbed the remote control and attempted to change the channel. The bartender was offended and roughly said: “*This is **my** house.*” Well, this is essentially what is happening in our gospel reading today. The Pharisees were saying to Jesus that the Temple was their house and only they had the right to change channels. I think Jesus’ question to them is intended to remind them whose house the Temple **really** is, you know, God’s.

If you are not aware of the context for our gospel reading today, let me lay out the story line. This discussion of authority comes immediately after Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the subsequent incident with animal sellers and money changers in the Temple courtyard. So it is safe to say that the Pharisees are probably already more on edge about Jesus than usual. These first two events are also followed by Jesus healing the blind and lame - in the Temple, no less; and then Jesus also cursing a fig tree. No wonder the Pharisees are highly agitated because they feel Jesus is directly attacking **their** authority, their power in multiple ways. I mean, Jesus is in the Temple itself, the very symbol of authority and power, mostly of God or on behalf of God. Now this issue of Jesus’ authority is not new in the Gospel of Matthew. The ideas of authority and identity have been ongoing and repeating throughout the gospel.

Our gospel reading today then ends with a parable about “two” sons. It is similar to the two sons in the prodigal son or prodigal father parable. There is, in fact, a long standing Israelite tradition of familial interactions, mostly around two or more sons. This tradition begins with Cain and Abel and also includes Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brother, Aaron and Moses, and David and his brothers. This tradition is laden with motifs of envy and betrayal, struggles for power, and yes, sometimes reconciliation. The key distinction between the brothers in our reading today turns on their **actions**, not their words. I am sure you have often heard the phrase actions speak louder than words. Well, it is true. I know we, the KLC `ohana, often speak about us being a welcoming community but I must bluntly tell you that I regularly see actions on our part that are not so welcoming. But that is okay. It is simply a demonstration of Martin Luther’s description of us as both sinners and saints. Yet, **our** goal is to strive to be better, to rise above, to **even** forget. Once again I hear the phrase that it is okay to **reference** the past but that it is not okay to **reside** in the past.

Hear then the good news:

What is the Spirit trying to say to us?

Is there something about Jesus’ authority – Jesus’ hesitancy to express it – that we need to discuss?

Are we more like the religious authorities in our attempts to “manage” any new activity God may be up to?

How do we test the spirits?

Remember that no matter what happened in the past, God is eager to meet us in the present and offer us an open future.

Each moment for us is pregnant with the possibility of receiving God’s grace.

God’s promise about an open future should shape our present, here and now.

Grace and peace to you, my friends. Live with generosity and love.

Amen