

Today, as we close one year and begin another I am reminded of the lyrics by the band Semisonic who recorded the song "Closing Time" in 1998. It begins:

Closing time, open all the doors
And let you out into the world
Closing time, turn all of the lights on
Over every boy and every girl

Closing time, one last call for alcohol
So, finish your whiskey or beer
Closing time, you don't have to go home
But you can't stay here

After the chorus it jumps to the following:

Closing time, *every new beginning*
Comes from some other beginning's end

I suppose some of you may have heard that song last night...or rather, early this morning. Then again, if you heard that song this morning, you probably aren't hearing my voice live, right now ;^)

This past Wednesday, Chuck Kennedy shared with church leaders that our articles of incorporation and certificate of consolidation have been accepted by the Ohio Secretary of State, effective January 1, 2023. That would be today's date. Friends, we are officially one congregation!

From the perspective of the Semisonic lyrics though, it means, for the past two years +, we have been putting an end to what two sets of pilgrims began; in the case of LCPC almost 100 years ago, for Faith UCC a few years shy of 70 years ago.

As Lyndhurst Community of Faith Church, our new beginning comes from some other beginning's end.

As we move into the text from Matthew, please hold that thought.

There are many directions one could go with the genealogy of Jesus. I'm choosing to look at it from the perspective of how Matthew organized it.

1. Let's begin with the opening sentence. I'll share it with you in *Greenkish* (that is, a combination of Greek and English). Verse 1 begins:
 - a. A *biblos* (that is, a book, or an account – sounds a lot like “Bible” doesn't it?)
 - b. of the *genesis* (whoa, that sounds familiar – kind of like the beginning of the Hebrew Scriptures! Right here, at the very beginning of the New Testament...how 'bout them apples?) In this instance, *genesis* means the foundational ancestry of – the origin story of – Jesus the Christ.
 - i. Please note: the genealogy that follows is NOT an historical record of the exact line of progeny that led to Jesus. Matthew has crafted a genealogical foundation to establish the author's theology of WHO Jesus is. You'll understand that more when I discuss the structure of this list.
 - c. Ok, this is, An account of the origin story of *iēsous christos*.

- i. The name Jesus is a derivative of the name “Joshua.” We will find out why he is named this further on in the chapter when an angel of God tells Joseph (the non-biological father) to give him the name because “he will save his people from their sins.”
- ii. *Christos* – the designation Christ, or Messiah, is an interesting one.
 1. It is NOT a last name – although lots of people use it as such.
 2. While we often connect it to the name ahead of it (Jesus), it is just as important to connect it to the description that follows, “the son of David.” For the Messiah is the “future ideal Davidic king.” And it is HERE that Matthew draws some broad strokes:
 3. Jesus
 4. The Messiah (or, Christ)
 5. The son of David (the so-called greatest king of Israel/Judah’s past)
 6. The son of Abraham (the OG – that is, the Original Guarantor of the covenant with the God who would later come to be known as YHWH)

So, A *biblos* of the *genesis* of *iēsous christos*, the son of David (the king of all kings), the son of Abraham (the OG of the covenant).

We’re only one sentence in, and already we’re dealing with ALOT! I will not continue in this manner with the rest of the geneology. You just need to

understand that there is much Matthew is trying to set up here, and it is much more than just a bunch of names that are strange to our hearing.

The next thing you need to know (need to know? Maybe, more appropriately, just a fun fact) is that the number 14 is important to Matthew. Recall the primary creation story - 7 days (six days of work, one day of rest), it is the complete cycle of a week - the number seven symbolizes completeness. In order for Matthew to *emphasize* that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation, he multiplies 7 x 2, and then creates a three-part story of God's covenant with the people of Israel/Judah.

1. Matthew divides the genealogy into three sections of 14 generations, and even goes so far to tell us so in verse 17: *So there were fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen generations from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen generations from the exile to Babylon to the Christ.*
 - a. Although, the third and final set contains thirteen names. One commentator suggests that the fourteenth and final generation is that of the church (or, those whom Jesus begat through his life, death, and resurrection). That would be us...we become part of the story.

Finally, I want to point out the four women who are named in the list. Well, three are named and one is characterized by her association to her husband, but everyone *knew* who she was. We have Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the "wife of Uriah," bedded by David, named Bathsheba. I would LOVE to share with you these women's stories, but we haven't the time this morning. So, this brief description will leave important info out. However, of note is

- A. That Matthew includes them in the male-dominated genealogy;
- B. That all of them are Gentiles, aka non-Jewish.
- C. Each of them played a critical role in the foundational story to continue
- D. Each of their stories contains, if not scandal, certainly intrigue.
- E. In my opinion, their inclusion makes the situation surrounding Mary's pregnancy yet another chapter in the miracle story that leads to Jesus being who Jesus is.
- F. If Jesus was aware of this genealogy, which I suspect he was, and was aware of the roles these women played in it, which I suspect he was, then it makes a lot of sense why so much of his ministry was concerned with the healing and wholeness of the women whom he encountered, and the significant roles certain women played in Jesus' earthly ministry!

While all the names (female or male) represented by these 41 (whoa, that's 14 backwards!) generations are all in the same lineage, the way Matthew divides them up helps us recall the lyric in the Semisonic song that "every new beginning / Comes from some other beginning's end." This genealogy is not a gradual building up of momentum that led naturally to the coming of Jesus - it was filled with fits and starts in the people's relationship with God, sometimes with the covenant originally cut with Abraham hanging on by a thread!

There were big moments when YHWH had to employ a hard stop and craft a new beginning! (David, exile, Jesus) This list is also filled with people of dubious character - LOTS of imperfect people - including the one who was the christological cloth from which Jesus was supposed to be cut, namely David.

But not just David, so many people whose life circumstances are all mixed up - and THEY are from where Jesus came.

And if the supposition is right, that there were 13 generations in the final group because the 14th makes up the church, then that means that those who follow Jesus (including us!), also make up a group of imperfect, mixed up, fully-human people who we might recognize in the mirror!

Indeed, we are inheritors of this story.

We are also the inheritors of the stories of our respective churches. The stories of those who created 60+ years of life at Fatih UCC and the stories of those who created 90+ years of life at LCPC. Indeed, we carry those stories with us. However, I would say that as we enter into this new year—as today marks Day One of Lyndhurst Community of Faith Church being an official entity!—this new beginning comes from some other beginning's end.

My partners in this endeavor, we are now being called to be trailblazers.

Whether we like to think of ourselves this way or not, we are the builders of something new. Even as we honor what has been, what has been has ended. The signs of the times are all around us (closing churches). And the crazy thing is, despite what we see, despite what we know is happening, there is an intense pull for us to try to go in the same direction as that from which we've come; even though we have a good idea where that will lead. *Is it a sign that leaky pipes burst in each of our old buildings last week, which is going to cause us to pay out more money towards these old buildings?*

2023 budget - not sustainable, and not something we will perpetuate moving forward. We have had conversations with all of the church staff to the effect that changes are going to need to be made, but the financial picture is currently what the financial picture is, and while we wish it were different, it isn't and we need to adjust.

Demographics - the same thing

Friends, we have the opportunity to react from a place of fear and anxiety, or we can choose to reframe our understanding of who we are, and take on the mind of a three year-old. Oh...that woke you up!

What do I mean by that? At three, we are looking at the world with wide eyes and, wondering. Our intersection with the world is one of honest curiosity. When we speak, mostly what comes out of our mouths are questions:

Number one being, "Why?"

Number two being, "How?"

Number three being, "What if...?"

Zen Buddhists call this way of looking at the world as having a "Beginner's Mind." As we move into this new year—a very unique year in the life of this nascent church—I'd like us to take on the approach of seeing our new life together with the beginner's mind.

(<https://www.betterup.com/blog/beginners-mind>)

Having a beginner's mind means you approach the world through a beginner's eyes. It means you look at every situation you're placed in as if it's the first time you are seeing it. *Why? How? What if?*

A beginner doesn't have any expectations, preconceived notions, or past experiences to limit their view of a situation. Beginners also have curiosity towards something new and are open and eager to learn.

This means that a beginner has access to a world of possibilities. When they try something new there are no existing expectations to limit their mindset about what could (and should) happen.

Having a beginner's mind means developing this mindset even when you already know something or have lots of experience with a topic.

(Like, "being a Christian," or "being a member of a church," or, "knowing how the church *ought to* interact with the world.")

On the other hand, an expert mind is an attitude taken when someone believes they know enough about something in order to achieve what they need to do. ...Although an expert may know a lot, an expert mindset provides a narrow point of view that can block you from finding new (and better) solutions to a problem.

A beginner, however, *is completely open when* approaching a problem or situation.

A beginner asks, Why? How? What if?

Our task is a delicate one. We have a Constitution, and denominational polity that mandates the answers to some of these questions. However, it will do us

no harm to ask anyway. And when we've discerned the answer is faithful to our understanding of the call of Jesus upon our lives together, then we ask ourselves whether or not what we've constituted about ourselves, or what our denominations require of us, remain relevant, or question how we should adjust to fit our current calling.

In many ways, Jesus didn't fit into the expectations of his lineage. As God incarnate, he really was looking at the world through a beginner's mind. Why can't we?

In the spirit of Matthew, I'm going to close with three three-line poems, the syllables of which are constructed in the sequence of 14, 14, 13:
(they also follow the gematria of DaViD's hebrew consonants, 4, 6, 4)

4 Why should we change
6 how we follow Jesus?
4 What if we thrive?

4 Beginner's mind
6 opens our hearts and lives
4 to something new.

4 A genesis,
5 For our children's faith.
4 God comes alive.

Happy New.....