***Those Women in Jesus’ Genealogy***

**A Sermon Preached at Lawrence Park Community Church, Dec. 24, 2017**

**Matthew 1:1-7**

**John Suk**

Tracing family genealogies has become a popular hobby. Genealogies give you a sense of who you are by laying bare your family history and roots. I have traced my family genealogy on the Suk side back 15 generations. It sounds like the genealogy in Matthew 1. It goes like this: "Jan lived 79 years and he died. Willem lived 55 years and he died. Tamme lived 65 years and he died." and so on.

This is dry stuff. But not in the Bible. Matthew has a genealogy that is actually brimming with scandal. Listen! It goes like this: "Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was *Tamar*."

Do you remember Tamar? According to the story in Genesis, Tamar's first two husbands, sons of Judah, died leaving her childless. Judah, her father-in-law, refused to give Tamar his third son to marry as the law required. So then, to get the child that was her due, Tamar then took matters into her own hands. She shed her widow's weeds and put on some prostitute's working clothes instead. She sat by the side of the road till she scored not with Judah’s third son, as the law required, but with Judah himself. She went to bed with her father-in-law, became pregnant, and had twins. One of them was Perez, the direct ancestor of Jesus.

So, Jesus' genealogy continues. "Perez was the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Ammininadab, Ammininadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab." Rahab, of course, was not the type to play at prostitution just once in her life, like Tamar, since prostitution was Jesus’ grandma Rahab’s full-time profession.

Rahab ran an unpretentious little establishment in the red-light district of Jericho and was known for, among other things, her warm and generous heart. That is why the spies from Joshua made a bee-line for her when they got into trouble, and why when the king of Jericho asked her to turn them over, she saved their necks by telling the king that they had just left. Now, for saving the lives of her spies, Rahab was spared when Jericho was destroyed, and as a bonus, she also had the honor of being one of Jesus’ grandmas.

And so, Jesus' genealogy in Matthew continues. "Rahab was the mother of Boaz, and Boaz was the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth." Ruth was born in Moab, member of a tribe the Israelites thought of as a particularly unclean and odious people. Nevertheless, when her husband, a Jew died, Ruth followed her mother-in-law Naomi back to Israel to help care for her. However, besides being a very loyal mother-in-law, Ruth was a scheming vixen too. She didn’t have a husband anymore, so one night she got all perfumed up and fancily dressed before she came on to a rich single man, Boaz. She waited till he was tipsy, and then crawled into his bed. When Boaz asked her what she was doing, she asked him to let her sleep with him. He did, and next thing you know the genealogy continues. "Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David. David was father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife."

Uriah's wife was Bathsheba, of course. Bathsheba was an adulterous woman. She must have been the beauty of the bunch too. When David saw her, from his roof, a bathing girl standing in a shallow pool dipping water over her bare shoulders with a pitcher, he saw both that he had to have her at any cost and that the cost would be exorbitant. So, for the sake of a fling with a beautiful woman Uriah died, and David and Bathsheba's out of wedlock child died and Absalom rebelled against his father. But in spite of all this, Bathsheba and David were both Jesus' ancestors.

So, Matthew passes over the likes of Sarah, Rachel, and Rebekah, and gives us Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba instead. But why? Why a genealogy filled with murderers, foreigners, and working women?

Well, a big part of why these women were mentioned has to do with the heart of God as revealed in Jesus. God is about grace, grace for any and all humans, even sinful, dangerous women like Tamar and Bathsheba. God works miracles of grace even in the lives of people like Ruth and Rahab, you and I.

Listen. All of us have felt ourselves to be trapped, or actually are trapped, by the webs of sin and circumstance. Some of us live with dark secrets that are private. Others here have sinned grandly and lavishly and everyone knows it. The four women in Matthew's genealogy have nothing on us. But as God loved them, and used them, so God loves us and wants to use us.

Nothing in our past lives; nothing we’ve hidden in the dark corners of our hearts is so terrible, or so scandalous that it can cut us off from God. And that is the meaning of Christmas as far as the odd genealogy in Matthew is concerned.