

"WOMEN OF ADVENT"
"Tamar, the Widow"

We begin a new sermon series as we start the Christian year. "*The Women of Advent*" invites us to consider not only the ancestors of Jesus, but how we carry on their faith and love as the bearers of Christ in our day and time. Over the next few weeks, we will focus on the women in the genealogy of Jesus as found in the first chapter of Matthew. This would be interesting in and of itself as in most genealogies' women are not named and if they are, it is in relationship with their husbands or their fathers. In this listing, not only are these women named, but three of these women are named and the fourth by the name of her murdered husband. Mostly these women are outsiders, of a different ethnic group and are known mostly because of the scandals by which they are associated. This first Sunday of Advent we learn about Tamar. This story comes in the midst of the Joseph narrative in Genesis. Judah, Tamar's father-in-law, was the brother who pulled Joseph out of the empty cistern and sold him in slavery. Tamar was a Canaanite and her story is more than a little eye-opening. Tamar's tenacious spirit and dedication to do what is right makes her named as an ancestress of King David and of Jesus. May Tamar's story make us bold in righteousness and faith.

Things I'd like to remember from today's sermon: **"Tamar, the Widow"**

Daily prayer: As we begin this new year, O God, thank you for those ancestors who remained faithful to you when their lives were difficult. As the source of their hope and ours, we ask that you walk with us in this season of Advent. Help us to wait with hopeful expectation, that you will help us to see the grace and the promise given to us in Christ. May we bring that grace and hope to others. In the name of Jesus, our Emmanuel we pray, Amen.

Study Guide

Monday, December 2, 2019 Matthew 1: 1-3

Matthew is the only gospel to include the genealogy of Jesus. Matthew's audience is primarily Jewish. It was important to the author of this gospel to show that Jesus is descended from Abraham and from King David. The "Christ" of God or the "Messiah" in Judaism must be a descendent of David and of Abraham. The second part of the first chapter of Matthew tells Joseph's story and that will be read on the last Sunday of Advent. It is important to note that Tamar is recognized by name. The twin sons she bears on behalf of her deceased husband are sired by her father-in-law. Many Christians would not recognize this, but Matthew's Jewish audience would know this information. It is more than a bit scandalous, but that is part of the point. God uses people who are willing to risk much to share the good news of grace and love. As we begin this Advent season, *in what ways do you see God breaking into our world in unusual ways?*

Tuesday, December 3, 2019 Genesis 38 : 1-11

This is the beginning of the story that was not read in worship on Sunday. These verses are not pretty. They are "racy" and uncomfortable. Most striking is that Tamar is used badly. Trying to be delicate, Onan uses Tamar, but in a way that will not produce a child. Onan knew the eldest son received a double portion of the inheritance. So, Er would receive $\frac{1}{2}$, Onan $\frac{1}{4}$ and Shelah $\frac{1}{4}$ of the estate. If Tamar gave birth, then the half would pass down to her child. If she did not have a child, the estate changed. Onan receives the double portion, which becomes $\frac{2}{3}$ when there are only 2 sons. That makes a huge difference in what he receives. In any case, his unwillingness to follow the law causes his death and Tamar is sent away because of the fear that she caused the death of both of her husbands. It was unfair and unjust. It was Judah's obligation to take care of her, instead not only was she ill-used, but sent away as well. *Can you recall times and/or places you have been mistreated? How does this change your understanding of Jesus and his willingness to stand up for the misused and mistreated?*

Wednesday December 4, 2019 Genesis 38: 12- 23

Tamar finds out Judah has no intention of providing her with a husband and his son Er with an heir. Much of this culture is foreign to modern day understanding. Tamar was Judah's "property". She was required to wear "widow's clothes", which marked her as unavailable. Judah was supposed to give her to his only son, but he didn't. She was shamed by being sent back to her father's house and by not being released to be married to someone else. She took matters into her own hands and changed clothes, put on a "party" dress and let Judah think she was prostitute. After concluding their "business" she asked for a few of his personal possessions until such time as he redeemed them with his payment. *Have you ever felt abandoned and ashamed? Have you felt desperate and cornered? Tamar's story speaks to a creative solution to a difficult and desperate problem. Today, say a prayer for those who feel they have no solutions to persistent problems.*

Thursday December 5, 2019 Genesis 38: 24-30

Tamar became pregnant and Judah was enraged. He called for her to be burned, until she sent the "personal items" of the father of her child. She is called righteous and she bears twins, one for each of the sons that Judah lost. Perez is the ancestor of Boaz and King David. Her name is proclaimed as a woman of honor, of hope and faithfulness. Modern sensibilities might be stunned by this. However, she remained faithful as an outsider, a Canaanite, when Judah of the house of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did not. She is a beacon of hope to those in desperate situations. *What of Tamar's story makes you most uncomfortable? What of her story gives you hope? How do you understand of Tamar as both the ancestor of Jesus and ours as well?*

Friday, December 6, 2019 Matthew 1: 3-5

After Tamar, Matthew named both Rahab and Ruth. Rahab, like Tamar was a Canaanite woman and she according to scripture was a prostitute. Her job was probably part of the fertility rituals in Canaan as well as offering an inn on the edge of town. Hers is the next story we will be focus on the second Sunday of Advent. Today spend some time pondering why it was important for Matthew to include these outsiders, these women in Jesus' ancestry. Was it his way of pointing out how God in Isaiah was preparing the people of Israel to be the light to which all nations would stream and together all people would walk in the light of God. *Today pray for the hope of God to be poured out on the world and for all people to see it, delight in it and find their hope in Christ.*