

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham  
“Giving from the Heart: Thankful Giving”

Dr. John Judson  
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Deuteronomy 15:7-11

Romans 11:1-6, 17-18, 29-32

This is my family Bible. It was given to my great-grand parents by their son, my grandfather for Christmas in 1905. It is my family Bible for several reasons. The first is that it contains one of our family stories; the story of Elizabeth Fitchett who was captured in a raid by British and Iroquois in the town of Wyoming, Pennsylvania in 1778. It also tells how she later escaped. It is my family Bible secondly because it contains much of my family genealogy. Though the named records run from some of my cousins back to those married before the Revolutionary War, there is also a footnote about William Judson who arrived in the New World in 1632, twelve years after the Mayflower arrived. For most of the time I have had this Bible, this is where my sense of it being my family Bible ended. Beyond that it was merely a really, really heavy Bible, with some great pictures and a pretty good binding to have lasted more than a hundred years. But last night, it began to dawn on me that there was more to this Bible as a family Bible than that. And this is where I want you all to take a Bible and work with me, as I show you why the Bible is not only my family Bible, but it is yours as well...it is your family Bible.

First turn to page one of the New Testament. This begins the story of Jesus of Nazareth, the savior of the world. In this section we will read all the Jesus’ stories, letters from the early church leaders like Paul, Peter and John, and then we will find the final book of Revelation, which completes the Biblical story. This my friends, is my family story. This my friends, is your family story. This is your family Bible. It is our story because we are those who have been baptized into the community of Jesus Christ. This is what we did this morning when we baptized Connor. He was baptized into this family of Jesus Christ. He was baptized into the stories, into the power and into the work this family. And as I said earlier, you have become his family. His brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles. This is our family Bible.

Second, hold your finger in the first page of the New Testament and then turn to page 10 of the Old Testament. This section is also our family story. This is the second part of our family Bible. It is this part of our family Bible that reminds us that we are also children of Abraham. Across the centuries many Christians have wanted to chuck this portion of the Bible because it does not explicitly speak about Jesus. Across the centuries, Christians have assumed that this portion of the Bible is about the Hebrews or the Jews and thus has nothing to say to us. Across the centuries, many Christians have believed that because they believe in Jesus and Jews do not that Christians are superior to the Jewish people. This is what the people in Rome thought. This is what Paul tells them is wrong. Paul makes it clear that God’s promises to the Jewish people are irrevocable; that God’s people will always be God’s people. And in fact, we Christians are only God’s people because we have been grafted into the trunk of Judaism. They are the original family and we are the adopted children. Because we have been grafted in, then this part of the Bible is our family Bible.

Finally, take hold of the first ten chapters of Genesis, which by the way is all that is left. This section of the Bible is also part of our family Bible. It is part of our family Bible because it is the story of humankind. It is the story of God creating all people in God's own image and breathing into them the breath of life. It is a reminder that not only are we Jesus people. Not only are we people grafted into the Jewish community, but that we are all part of the human family. It is a reminder that this means we are no better than anyone else but that we are simply different. This sense of the unity of all humanity can be seen in Jesus' life. He met with non-Jews and considered them to be worthy of his love and grace. He met with Samaritans and Romans, he met with outcasts and tax collectors. Jesus had a profound sense that all of humanity was linked by God's love and care.

What does this mean then on this day? It means two things.

First hate has no place in God's family. Throughout history, hate has been one of the few constants. There has been Christian on Christian hate (my father-in-law spoke of his youth where Catholic and Orthodox Christians would fight each other). There has been hatred of the Jews, which was around even before Jesus. There has been hatred of Muslims from the moment they came into being. And once again we are seeing a manifold increase in hatred here in this country and in the world. We see it in the language used toward migrants fleeing violence and seeking a better life; with one commentator wondering if we might shoot them. We see it in the language and acts of intimidation used against Muslims, Siks, and other non-Christians. We see it in the abuse heaped on the LGBTQ community. We see it in the abuse of people of color. We saw it in its most evil form yesterday in Pittsburg, where a man driven by years of hate took the lives of innocent people at a Bris, a Jewish naming ceremony for a child. My friends, this hate is directed toward those people seen as the other. But these people are not the other. They are part of our family, whether that is our Christian, Abrahamic or human family. They are all in our family Bible.

The second thing that this means is that when you make your pledge to this church during the final hymn, you are giving to a community that knows who it is. We are a community of followers of Jesus the Christ, who commits itself to Christ's ministry of love, peace and justice. We are a community of those who are linked with other Abrahamic faiths, striving to be faithful to God. We are a community of those who are linked by our common humanity with all people around the world. You are supporting a community that is hate free, where all are welcome, where all are loved. This is who we are as Everybody's Church.

My challenge to you this morning is to ask yourself, how am I seeing every human being I encounter, that I see on the news, that I read about on-line, as part of my family and then treat them as such.