

God's Seed
By Rev. John Boyles

The Ohio River Valley was the frontier in the early 1800's.

Among the frontiersmen there was a rather strange figure to be seen. The man was to be recognized by his ragged coat and worn-out garb, by his eccentric ways by his religious frame of mind.

His name was John Chapman and he came from Pennsylvania, where he had started a tree nursery. Now in Ohio, he would go around to visit cider presses, and there he would gather the left-over pulp, sift out the seeds, and then sort them. He would then urge people who were heading further west to take the seeds he had gathered with them.

For forty years, Chapman himself went up and down the Ohio Valley and planted seeds ... apple seeds ... and so some started calling him not John Chapman, but "Johnny Appleseed," which is a name that endures to this day, and one we know because of his enduring deeds and seeds and indeed his creed. He shared life with thousands of others, setting part of God's creation free, free to grow in new fields, and free to grow into the future, into our own time.

Someone once asked Francis of Assisi, while he was tending his beloved plants in his garden, what he would do if he were suddenly to learn that he would die at the setting of the sun that very day.

Francis paused, and then answered simply, "I would finish hoeing my garden."

A beautiful thought. Francis would have continued to bring plants to life, he would have continued to let his garden grow, setting the creation free, and free to be harvested.

We have just celebrated the harvest of God's earth, celebrating fruitfulness, abundance and plenty, of the soil and of the land. We are thankful for it, and we did indeed give -- Thanksgiving.

And in the first Thanksgiving, the Pilgrims thanked their Creator God for abundance and for deliverance from an old world toward a new, having come from the old world to the new, a newly planted colony, a new flowering of the earth, having sailed upon the **Mayflower**, to not only a New England, but to a New Jerusalem, in their words, to plant a shining new "**city on a hill**," to be able to live in both faith and freedom.

And on that voyage, they did come as a people of faith, as a congregation, as a local church. They came as families, as **husbands and wives**, and children.

We have continued that family tradition, as we have gathered as a nation, a few days ago, in families, in family homes, generally, and eating at a common table, from

communal bowls, "family-style," and usually from one carved turkey, served on a communal platter.

There was another family gathering, which gathered together many years ago ... The Lord's angel appeared to Jesus' uncle, Zechariah, and told of the birth of his son John, Jesus' cousin; you heard of his birth last Sunday, and how, in Zechariah's words, John was to "... go before the Lord to prepare His way."

In other words, that John the Baptist was to go first down the highway of God, into the desert, to "prepare the way." Those were the Old Testament words of Isaiah, which you affirmed as we lit the candles at the beginning of worship.

So, a family member, a relative, a cousin, goes ahead, before Jesus, just as the previous generations had gone before.

Then, that is why our New Testament reading today [Matthew 1:1-17], about the prior generation of Jesus, refer to those who ... begat, begat, begat. Who really cares about all those nearly un-pronounceable, ancient names? Who really cares? Well, I'll tell you: **God** cares! And we should care, as well.

The Lord of Creation, the God of Genesis, the God of Israel who neither slumbers nor sleeps, the One who watches over His creatures, who cares about each and every one, all the lives, all the links in the great chain of generations, all who have labored to bring to fruition the faith of Israel, from the seed of Abraham to the seed of David to the harvest of the Christ, the Savior of the world!

And that Christ, that infant Jesus, born in Bethlehem, in that ancestral city, was born, after all those generations before, into a family, into a pre-existing family, into a marriage, that of Mary and Joseph. Their "betrothal" was indeed a marriage.

That's because, in Jewish marriage custom of the first century, a betrothal was a legally binding covenant, and in an actual betrothal ceremony a man and a woman took vows which did establish a marital bond between the two, the man and the woman. It was not like our modern "engagement," which, remember, is not legally binding.

A betrothal could last for two or even three years, and in that period, a betrothed woman was often referred to as a "wife." (Matthew 1:18-20) When the actual wedding ceremony occurred, it was mainly a communal and family celebration, as the binding marital vows of the betrothal were simply repeated, i.e. the marriage already existed.

Jesus was thus born into a family, he was not born "out of wedlock." He was born and raised in a Jewish marriage, one between Joseph and Mary, between husband and wife, between male and female. That was the only kind of marriage he knew.

He was raised and nurtured in a traditional married household, with both father and mother as examples, as "role models" in modern terms. From his father he learned the

profession of a skilled craftsman of the time, carpentry. His lineage is even traced through his earthly father's family, at the very beginning of the New Testament in Matthew Chapter 1.

Marriage in Jesus' belief was a covenant relationship between a man and a woman. He would not have acknowledged any other as relationship as such, and certainly not between or among those of the same gender.

Jesus himself affirmed true marriage by citing Genesis--

"male and female created He them" -- and --

"the two shall become one flesh"

Now, we are simply standing upon the nearly four thousand-year-old law of marriage, between a man and a woman, the ancient Judaic view, which is the very foundation for marriage, and family, in all of Western Civilization.

Now, some would ask, "Don't you mean the Christian view of it?" or, "Don't you mean the Judeo-Christian religious view?"

Well, both of the above are true, but they just followed the tradition of Moses, and the Torah, they followed actually from the whole history of God's people, from the families and the generations of Israel, all the way from Adam and Eve, from Noah and his wife and sons, from Abraham and Sarah. And, of course, Jesus and Paul, both Jewish, also held to the Jewish views of marriage, as did others, such as the early Christians (also primarily Jews). They all held to the Jewish belief that marriage was ONLY for a man and a woman.

This, then, comes directly from Moses on Mt. Sinai: "Honor your father and your mother." Male and female are written directly into the faith of Israel, into Judaism. Jesus therefore affirms this, and continues this standard throughout His life and teaching. He never changed that standard.

Now, today, we hear that Jesus would want to have seen yet another kind of marriage--that between ANY two people who say they love one another. This is simply not so, as Jesus' history of blessing a marriage, such as the one in Cana of Galilee, was the blessing of husband and wife.

Jesus clearly affirmed traditional family, traditional marriage, speaking of a husband as being the husband of one wife, not "sister wives," and so forth. Any similar arrangement involving two or more persons of the same gender, in any context, would be equally contrary to the Creator's design for family, for human life and its continuance of the generations.

The full expression of the Creator's design becomes clear when we acknowledge that God is the head of a family, as He is the Father of our Lord and Savior, God's Son,

Jesus Christ ... they are related, intertwined ... the Son created by, begat by, the Father, by the love of God. It is an intimate family relationship, Father and Son--and Holy Spirit, united as one.

The seed of Abraham, the seed of David, the seed of God, in Jesus Christ ... all that we come to celebrate in this season, makes this a holy time: seedtime and harvest, seed of God the Father, in the birth of His Son, the true harvest of God on earth--new life in Jesus, His own begotten Son.

Now, some persons in these days do seem to be concerned about the idea that Jesus' seed might still be about, on earth; one Dan Brown, and the "DaVinci Code" book, comes to mind. Apart from the impossibility of this theory, there is also no need for it, in God's greater plan. You see, there is no need for such a physical, secret, down-through-the-ages lineage, hidden from human view.

No, the seed of Jesus is not hidden, nor out of sight. It is in full sight -- it is already here! It is here in the fruit, in the harvest in the love which is in the gathering of Jesus' Believers, His Disciples, His Descendants-in-the-faith--you ... and you ... and you ... you who believe and trust in Him!

You are the **seed**, the "apple of His eye."

You are His beloved, **you** are his child!

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