

Jon Hauerwas – June 10, 2018 – “Identity Politics”  
Psalm 138:1-8 and Mark 3:20-35

In 2006, the famed British vocalist Amy Winehouse sang, “They tried to make me go to rehab, but I said, ‘no, no, no.’” Five years later, the singer’s reckless lifestyle, fueled by heroin and alcohol abuse, was over at age 27. Hers was a bitter end for such a gifted artist.

An intervention is a combination of strategies used to sway the opinions and behaviors of someone whose life appears destructive. Friends and family gather with a loved one to verbally state how his or her actions are personally affecting them. They are joined by a physician, counselor, or intervention specialist who offers a medical or academic perspective. As a united front, the concerned parties appeal to both the heart and the head.

In our New Testament lesson this morning, Jesus and his closest disciples are huddled together inside of home. The scene outside is chaotic. The crowd is swelling. People are pushing against one another and beating on the front door. Faces press up against windows, in the hope of spotting one of the leaders inside. But the curtains are drawn. Jesus and his disciples are trying to eat and to rest for a few moments before addressing the people.

Here, Jesus' biological family is on the outside looking in. They are confused and growing increasingly concerned. As his life passes before their eyes, they wonder why they didn't do more to stop him. They remember that time when he was just an adolescent. The rest of the family, dozens of them in all, were returning home from the Passover celebration in Jerusalem. It was assumed that Jesus was among them. But, he wasn't. Instead, he was still in the city, debating with the religious scholars.

His panicked parents searched everywhere before ultimately discovering him in the temple. And yet, far from feeling or acting like a lost child, Jesus presented himself as if his parents were the ones who were really lost. He even seemed to distance himself from them by saying, "Did you not know that I would be in my Father's house?" How odd!

Yes. He was always infatuated with religion. But, things were starting to go off the rails. First, he told his disciples that they must leave family and profession behind. Then, he began referring to anyone who does the will of God as "my brothers and sisters." The time for an intervention had come.

Today's text tells us that Jesus' family "went to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind.'" In other words, they planned to seize him and return him to the quiet life of a laborer. In this endeavor, they are joined by the leading academics, the teachers of the law, who came down from Jerusalem and said, "He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons."

Jesus, though, is quick to note that such an intervention is misguided. "How can Satan drive out Satan?" he inquires. "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come."

Friends, have you ever heard of what happens when a number of crabs are placed in the same barrel? Inevitably, one of them will try to climb out, only to be grabbed by one of the others and dragged back in. The desire for greater autonomy by the one is met with stiff resistance and a desire to maintain the status quo from the others. Oftentimes, so it is with us as well.

Or, to quote Pheme Perkins, "many people prefer to maintain the traditional patterns of personal, family, or social life rather than make radical changes that might

bring greater health or happiness to a troubled situation.”<sup>1</sup> Jesus, in other words, was not out of his mind. He was simply offering a radically new perspective on something that others had long taken for granted.

The title of today’s sermon is “Identity Politics.” Identity politics are when people of a particular race, ethnicity, gender, or religion form alliances and organize politically to defend their group’s interests. In Jesus’ case, some willingly embraced the nascent, Christian movement. But, for others, it was both unnerving and threatening to watch him shatter these many, long-established norms.

Jesus’ life and ministry were certainly unconventional. But, that doesn’t mean that he was out of his mind. It means that he was revolutionary. And we, as his followers, are likely to encounter some of the same resistance that he did as when we tell the world, obsessed with affluence and power, about the value of servanthood, meekness, and love. We need not be surprised when our thoughts are quickly dismissed and mistaken for idealistic naivety. When friends and family listen before responding “well, that’s all fine, well, and good. But, here in the real world...”

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<sup>1</sup> Pheme Perkins, *Mark, The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary Volume VIII*, ed. Leander Keck (Abingdon Press, 1995), 565.

Or when we notice the importance of the American military complex in every region of the world.

By refusing to live conventionally, by targeting existing worldviews, and by making enemies everywhere he went, Jesus put himself on a collision course with death. His family warned him. So did the religious elites. They all thought that he should be monitored, committed, or institutionalized. Predictably, he was executed at age 33. But, by breaking free from the tomb, he proved once and for all that he was no crab in a barrel. May it be so, and all thanks be to God both now and forever.