

Jon Hauerwas - October 7, 2018 - "Unashamed"  
Lamentations 3:22-29 and 2 Timothy 1:1-14

This morning, I want to share with you three stories held together by a common theme. We will begin globally, with the topic of stereotypes associated with particular nations and with entire regions around the world. As you already know, stereotypes can be both positive and negative. Anyone who travels abroad is subject to this, and is likely to be evaluated based upon others' preconceived notions about what it means to be an American.

When I was in college, our country experienced the attacks of 9/11. I graduated the following year, as American-led wars raged in Iraq and Afghanistan. At that time, I was preparing for a year of voluntary service on behalf of the Presbyterian Church. And though I was preparing for residence in the United Kingdom, my orientation process was shared with young adults being commissioned to serve in Africa, Central and South America, and Asia.

With American foreign policy on the forefront of our minds, many of the volunteers, and particularly those assigned to non-Western nations, wondered how they would be perceived in the countries they hoped to serve. I heard a number of conversations about the potential of being raked over coals on foreign soil. And, in an effort to avoid direct confrontations in public spaces, some suggested diffusing

the tensions by claiming Canadian citizenship, instead. That's the first story.

Here's the second one. My sons are now ages 8 and 2. They are both at the developmental stage when, if I haven't seen them for a while, they will gladly come running, throw their arms around me, and say, "Daddy, Daddy." While moments like these make me feel appreciated, I'm also a realist. I know that it won't always be this way.

Reflecting on my own adolescence, I imagine that I was probably an ideal middle and high schooler in every way, much as I am sure that all of you were, as well. But, I can easily report on my brother's shortcomings during that period. In those years, we lived in the countryside, many miles from school. We didn't have any neighbors who attended the same schools, students who could easily pick us up and take us there. If we were to ride the bus, we would be the first riders on and the last ones off. So mercifully, our mother drove us to school on her way to work in the mornings and picked us up late in the afternoon, using her lunch break.

When my brother was a freshman, he reached an awkward phase. He would soon be able to drive himself, but he wasn't old enough yet. Many of the other students had their own cars and awaited the privilege of parking in the school lots.

It was at that point, as my brother was waiting his turn at seniority, that he became more than a little self-conscious about being seen with his mother.

Despite the fact that she gave birth to him, woke up to feed him in the middle of the night, changed his dirty diapers, and paid for his every earthly possession for over a decade, he could no longer abide with being seen in her presence in the drop off line at school. So he chose, as if it was some sort of covert mission, to have my mother drop him off a couple of blocks away. That way, he could confidently join his peers on his own. That's the second story.

And here's the last one. It comes from Mark's Gospel in the 14th chapter. Jesus had just been crucified. Peter, one of the twelve disciples, was in the courtyard. At that time, "one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, 'You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth.' But, he denied it, saying, 'I do not know or understand what you are talking about.'"

But, the servant-girl was unconvinced. She began to say to the bystanders, 'This man is one of them.' But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, 'Certainly, you are one of them; for you are a

Galilean.' But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, 'I do not know this man you are talking about.'"

Friends, what would lead us to deny our country, our family, or Jesus? I imagine that fear of verbal or physical abuse are chief among them. No one wants to be mocked, or scorned, or ridiculed. No one wants to be publicly humiliated, spat upon, arrested, or killed. And when given a choice, most of us will gladly choose the path of self preservation.

I offer these three stories today as a reminder of just how nuanced our allegiances can be. An American citizen who is typically grateful for the freedoms our society provides can just as easily squirm under the criticism of others who feel that America is not always a force for good in the world. A high school student who loves his mother and appreciates all that she has done for him can just as easily be embarrassed by her in the presence of his friends. And a faithful disciple of Jesus can just as easily deny that he ever knew the crucified Lord.

Some people are ashamed of their size or weight. Others are ashamed of their addictions, or of mental health challenges which often allow addictions to flourish. Some are ashamed of speech impediments or even their unique interests

which set them a part from others. As highly social creatures, we often wish to keep our flaws - real or perceived - and our obvious differences hidden, lest others seek to exploit them.

Publically, it has become fashionable to speak ill of the church and of organized religion, in general. Many who choose to mock the church view religious life as overly restrictive. They view the church and its practitioners as overly concerned about arbitrary rules, etiquette, and decorum rather than the self sacrifice modeled by Jesus. For many, the church seems overly judgmental, and altogether lacking in the kind of grace that Christ offers. The answer to such criticism is not to abandon the church in frustration, but to seek to create a more loving, just, and faithful community - the kind of place where one's actions are more highly valued than one's appearance, and where one's heart is the true measure of one's character.

On this World Communion Sunday, we are reminded of how quick we are to say, "I'm not one of *those* kinds of Christians," whoever *they* may be. For today, we recall those followers whose perspectives are vastly different from our own and who are still a part of the one, holy, and universal church of Jesus Christ. Today, with joy and with pride, we proclaim our faith in Jesus Christ. Unashamed in the

face of criticism, we will strive each day to love one another. May it be so and all  
thanks be to God. Amen.