

# “Not Ashamed”

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**Third Presbyterian Church**  
**October 4, 2015 (World Communion Sunday)**  
**Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12**

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Allow me two extended words this morning. They are connected in so many ways as we think on this World Communion Sunday about what it means to live as people of faith in the world, with commitments to justice and reconciliation within our walls and beyond them, for all of God’s children.

At noon today, we will host James Norman of Action for a Better Community and FR=EE, Facing Race, Embracing Equity, for a conversation on race. It may be a provisional conversation, an awkward one, an uncomfortable one. But it is an important one and a necessary one. We will not solve anything today, but perhaps we can advance something, in our hearts, in our church, in our community.

And I am not sure what there is to say or do about the shootings in Oregon this week, which follow so many others, including the shootings at the Rochester Boys and Girls Club this summer. We agonize. We pray. Because we care for peace and because we care for all who grieve, our call to prayer must be joined with a call to action. We have a Third Church gun violence response team, who, following these events, is ready to engage this conversation at a deeper level. We are people of hope, not hopelessness, so our mandate is clear. If you’d like to get involved in any of this, whether it be further conversation on race or our gun violence response team, please let me know, or find us on Facebook.

In the old Scottish tradition, which we mark in our liturgy this morning, an elder would have visited you on the day before a communion Sunday, to assess whether you were prepared, spiritually, to receive the sacrament. That seems not only quaint, but at least a slight misinterpretation of grace and hospitality. Given all that is going on in our world and all that might be going on in each of our spirits, perhaps we could pause for a silent moment to prepare our hearts for the hearing of the word and for the invitation to the table that will follow, remembering as we do all those affected by gun violence everywhere, across the country and in our own backyard.

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Follow the line of thought in what we just heard, because as profound as it is, it is not easy to trace. We first hear about Jesus, who reflects to us all that God is, and who forgives our sins. Then we learn that though we are not angels, we are certainly cared for by God, important to God. We matter. But we matter because God has determined that we do, not because of who we are, our achievements, our accomplishments, our attributes, our credentials. Even a life of devotion and piety will not earn us God’s favor. It is God’s doing. We should remember that.

We should also remember that we matter so much to God that though we die, death is not the last word. Jesus takes on hardship and suffering and even death for us, that we might enjoy life now, and life in glory. That matters in the life to come, but it matters in this life as well.

Listen to this again. “It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters...”

I could read those words a thousand times and discover a thousand facets. This time, and this facet, discovered in a moment when our world seems to be spinning apart, when gunshots ring out in Oregon and Rochester, when the death penalty is applied in Georgia, when a politics of division hinders not only civil discourse but the pursuit of real solutions, when so many of us are carrying our own heavy burdens and carrying the heavy burdens of others, when faith is used as a wedge and a hammer, here is what I discovered. *This table*, and its promise. *This table*, and its radical hospitality. *This table*, and the vision that there is a place for me and a place for you and a place for everyone born.

Because Jesus was a flesh and blood person, who experienced life in its fullness as we do, and because Jesus is at the same time holy and invites us into holy relationship with God, then he is NOT ASHAMED to call us brothers and sisters. Not ashamed. Not ashamed. Think about what that means, for you, for me, for all of us.

If you are a young person, cut from a team or rejected by a college or feeling so alienated that you would consider cutting yourself – God is not ashamed of you.

If you are a young adult searching and questioning and wandering, lacking – in your own mind at least – purpose or hope – God is not ashamed of you.

If you or the person to the right of you or the left of you is facing depression; if you have trouble getting up each day, this day; if you look in the mirror and wonder who you are – God is not ashamed of you.

If you are an immigrant or refugee, fleeing a homeland for political or economic or religious reasons, and if no nation wants you – God is not ashamed of you. And, rather, God wants us to determine ways to welcome you, even as Jesus and Mary and Joseph were refugees, even as we who gather here were once immigrants to this nation.

If you are in a racial or sexual minority and public laws and cultural practices and even religious tenets have left you outside of the circle, making you doubt that you were created in the image of God even when your heart tells you so – God is not ashamed of you.

If you sense that memory loss is creeping up on you and you are losing touch with your world – God is not ashamed of you.

If you are lost in grief or despair or brokenness, in your body or your mind or your spirit – God is not ashamed of you.

If you are so sure of yourself that you've convinced yourself that you are master of your own universe, that you have no need of God – God is not ashamed of you.

You can craft your own litany, from your own relationships and experiences. But know, every time, that God's welcome defies every expectation, for all the people you encounter or consider, including the person you encounter in the mirror.

If you are sitting in a pew this morning, wondering if there really is a place for you at this table, know that there is. And know that God is not ashamed of you.

And because God is not ashamed of you, we are called to share that good news with every beloved child of God.

We are called to receive nourishment at this table, much more than any little bite of bread or sip of juice could ever provide, and devote ourselves to living into that promise, for us, for our children, for our neighbors.

World Communion is a lovely vision. Perhaps it can become a lovely reality. And God, who is not ashamed of us – you or me – will delight when we are creators of justice and joy, compassion and peace. Amen.