

**The Reverend Jon Hauerwas – November 15, 2020 – Choosing the Way
Malachi 3:1-4,6-7 and Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-15**

As one of the creators of both *Seinfeld* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, Larry David is a well-known figure in the entertainment industry. But he's not the only writer, actor, or comedian in the family. His daughter, Cazzie, has followed in his footsteps, and she, too, is gaining a reputation for herself. In her latest book, she writes about one of the most challenging seasons of her life.

It was 2018. For two and a half years, Cazzie had been dating Pete Davidson, a cast member on *Saturday Night Live*. When their relationship fizzled, Davidson began posting images of himself, hand-in-hand with pop star Ariana Grande. Within weeks, the new couple was engaged.¹

Cazzie David was devastated, and her inner turmoil soon manifest in a number of troubling ways. "On the plane to her sister's college graduation," Cazzie's father held her as she "shook uncontrollably in his arms for the entire flight." When they arrived at the hotel, she curled up in the bathroom crying. And when she tried to sleep, it didn't last. She ultimately jolted awake, "screaming in agony." It was then that her father pulled her from the bed in an effort to stop her mental health spiral.

¹ <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/books/story/2020-11-11/cazzie-david-essayist-on-no-one-asked-for-this-pete-davidson-nepotism>

“CAZZIE, COME ON!” her father told her. “YOUR ANCESTORS SURVIVED THE HOLOCAUST!”²

At that moment, Larry David was entering into his daughter’s anxiety in a new way. Her was reminding her of the resilience needed in the midst of personal sorrow. And he was insisting that this very public heartache be placed in perspective alongside the long-suffering of her forebears.

Families often share stories of courage, strength, and fortitude as a means of encouraging the next generation. Late in life, when my grandfather broke his decades-long silence regarding his own participation in D-Day and World War II, our extended family sat in rapt attention, absorbing lessons of survival from a man who had witnessed far too much suffering.

Friends, I harbor no illusions that my own, present challenges are somehow comparable to the injuries of war. I know better. But I also understand that future generations will one day sit in rapt attention to hear my testimony of what it was like to raise children in the midst of a global pandemic. How did you stay healthy? How did you balance your responsibilities as a parent and as a professional? What

² Ibid.

was the impact on the children? How did those experiences change you? Looking back, is there anything that you would do differently?

Friends, we are now writing our own stories of endurance, and perseverance, and survival. Like Larry David, we are employing the struggles of previous generations in an effort to discern what is needed most to meet this moment. And in the midst of our current challenges, we are reminded of the examples of our spiritual ancestors whose confidence in God's promises lifted them up from the pit of despair and placed them upon the solid rock our salvation.

These individuals succeeded, not on the merits of their own strength, but through mighty acts of remembrance, by which they were able to transcend the bounds of time and place in claiming an ancient covenant as their own.

In our second lesson this morning, Joshua addresses the perennial challenge of the people of God. Namely, in a world in love with idols, whom or what will we choose to serve?

Will we choose to serve our desire for status until our lives are devoid of meaning and purpose? Will we long to acquire still more possessions, at the risk of destroying our planet? Will we feed our addiction to technology until we find

ourselves living with scattered, constantly diverted attention? Will we covet an ever more me-centered life, until our every whim is met and, yet, we continue our search for true satisfaction?

Yes. What are the idols that stand in our way as, daily, we witness the world's longing for the so-called good life? And what does it mean to encounter the abundant life made known in Christ? When Joshua says, "choose this day whom you will serve," he reminds us that our earthly wandering is no accident. Instead, each journey is the culmination of our motivations and convictions. A fulfillment of our priorities and investments.

None of this is to imply that we each get what we deserve or have earned in this lifetime, as if human initiative has the final say. But it is to say that our choices are real, and that the consequences are all too apparent. Pursuing life on our terms, we ignore God at our peril. The question for us is how we might experience God in the present moment. And how might our example prove instructive for disciples who follow in the way?

Thanksgiving is approaching and our hearts are aching. Grandparents have long been separated from their grandchildren. Travel plans have halted. Teachers

are scrambling. Hospitals are filling. Increasingly, people that we know are falling ill, and the reality of a long winter is sinking in. There are many things that are weighing us down, and our mental health is faltering.

But even amid the many stressors of this time, we still have the ability to choose whom we will serve. So will it be the path of perpetual mourning, or will mourning eventually give rise to the song of our ancestors, who stepped free from bondage, and fixed their gaze on the Promised Land?

Sometimes, we need someone like Larry David to grab hold of us in the midst of our anxiety. To remind us of where our people have been. And to point us in the direction of a more hopeful future. Yes. Even amid our personal sorrows and public disappointments, may we still choose the path of hope and the way of life. May it be so and all thanks be to God. Amen.