

“The familiar accusation.”

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“Uncomfortable”

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A classic definition of preaching is to “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.” God help preachers considered nice. They, then, aren’t doing their job. Not as if the Bible is nice.

Remember the movie “Braveheart,” about William Wallace? What a gripping story, but terribly inaccurate. Sorry, no prima noctes, no blue faces, no romance with the princess. Wallace wasn’t a commoner – he was an aristocrat. No kilts either.

I’m terribly guilty in wanting to romanticize, idealize the past; although, I imagine if we could jump aboard the ‘WABAC Machine’ and return to view ourselves in the past, our perception of the past might be too cruel to be endured. Better the rose colored glasses, yes? Yes, I’m proud of my Scottish heritage. I’ll admit to being an unabashed cheerleader for Presbyterianism and Scotland, extolling the virtues of Scotland, the Scottish enlightenment, and the principles my church espouses: Our spirit of self-reliance, personal responsibility; That the United States Constitution is inspired by the Presbyterian form of government; Our bootstrap mentality (as Carnegie said to the English one day: “You look to your officials to govern you, instead of you governing them”); Our sense of duty to family, to clan; Our distaste for patrician ease; Our emphasis on education. Impoverished Scotland’s 17th century literacy rate was the highest in the world: 85%. Boys and girls.

Although, do these virtues belong exclusively to Scotland and Presbyterians? Aye, there be sin. Cannot these virtues be found in people from other lands, whether Spain, China, Columbia, Mexico, Ghana, or even those who come from England? Since when is racial or religious pride a virtue? Shall we also consider our other Scottish gifts to America: the KKK, cross burnings, an exacting religious fundamentalism, a myopic intolerance toward America’s destiny and promise of a richer pluralism? Ach, man, more sin.

Want other example? Maybe you don’t. Our senior seniors might remember that sentimental love story of how King Edward VIII abdicated England’s throne because he loved and intended to marry a divorced American woman, Mrs. Simpson, contrary to Anglican Church law. A tragic and beautiful love story. Except, King Edward supported Hitler and she likely was a Nazi spy. Edward wanted England to become Germany’s ally. What do you do when the King is borderline treasonous?

Washingtonville’s DeLong Memorial Hall displays items featuring Charles Lindbergh’s solo flight across the Atlantic, May 20-21, 1927. The museum rightly celebrates this remarkable achievement. History must also be thorough. Scholars assess how Lindbergh was a Nazi sympathizer. Lindbergh and his America First Movement was fueled by isolationism and anti-Semitism. Lindbergh advocated for a neutrality pact with Hitler. We today would call him a white supremacist, typical of his era. Lindbergh feared “dilution by foreign races.”

Adulthood is complicated, requiring responsibility -- personally, socially -- which explains why we fear learning history. My boyhood shook off lazy innocence when our Junior High librarian rolled up his

sleeve and respected my family enough to show me his tattoo from Auschwitz. The comfortable afflicted. To gloss over teaching the Holocaust cheapens the Allied armies' victories.

A friend pastored near Coatesville, Pennsylvania. They were preparing to celebrate their church's history. They were excited. It also was a time when his church and a nearby church were upset with issues stressing the denomination. They fretted that the larger church was forgetting the Bible, unlike them. They feared that the denomination had veered away from true righteousness, unlike them. My friend uncovered from old newspapers an interesting tidbit about Coatesville's history. He came across a curious incident that happened after World War I involving many of the grandfathers from members of the two churches. Two young black men were arrested for alleged indecent conduct toward a white woman. The familiar accusation. The grandfathers didn't feel like waiting for the trial to punish them, so they decided to do it themselves. These leading citizens of town and church took the two young men out, lynched them, set them on fire. My friend, unmannerly, mentioned that bit during the banquet. History's a curious thing especially when you're dishonest about the past, living in an idealized delusion. It's easy exposing their past. Can you handle disclosing your past?

I hope leaders busily sanitizing school curriculums would have the guts to read the poem, "Let American Be America Again," by Langston Hughes. I hope it's required reading by High School students, and not just this month: "O, let America be America again—The land that never has been yet—."