NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

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"What we have loved, others will love, and we will teach them how."

(W. Wordsworth, from "The Prelude")

NOTES FROM READERS

>>What you think<<

Happy Spring! We have just had our (always early) commencement ceremonies and I am reflecting on an academic year marked by both exciting initiatives on campus (a new building, a name change and planning for a 150th anniversary) and disturbing and disrupting social forces. We live in the tensions, which more and more calls for reflective practice! It is a privilege to be on this journey with all of you.

Occasionally, I (or my colleagues) refer to items from previous issues of Notes. If you have not been a subscriber previously, and wish to review our conversations, past issues of Notes are available on-line at www.jgacounsel.com. I thank my friends at Johnson, Grossnickle & Associates for their many years of abiding support for our reflective practice.

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REFLECT ON THIS

>>Repairers of the Breach<<

Here is a homily I preached in our chapel in March…

Scripture: Psalm 122

"Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together…For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good."

"A city that is bound firmly together…" I wonder if any of us can imagine what such a place, such a city, such a country or world would look like today? The breach is wide. We hurl words at each other without any intent to unite. We claim our own facts. We have lost all sense of the true meaning of "conversation," whose Latin root means both to talk with each other and to live with each other. Bound firmly together seems a far-fetched dream.

Our colleague, Harry Boyte and his partner Marie-Louise Strom, have recently challenged all us – citizens, people of faith, people who believe in education for democracy – in the words of the prophet Isaiah: "You will rebuild the ancient ruins…You will be called the repairer of the breach" (Isaiah 58:12). To rebuild the ruins, to repair the breach, they argue, we must seek to navigate the Manichaean divide that polarizes and paralyzes our common lives. We must seek to find the words and actions that, while recognizing our differences, allow us to negotiate a way forward together.

I am a long-time student of a sociologist named Robert Bellah, who, with a group of colleagues, published an influential book back in the early 1980s titled *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. It is a compelling book for those of us who care about the social fabric of our country and who, at the same time, believe that we are called by God to be of service in the world.

Bellah's most significant point in the book is that contemporary Americans have a first language that is very much focused on our individual lives and especially our economic well-being. When we talk about what we do and why we do it, we tend to talk about how it helps me rather than how it helps the wider community. Even our best work – our most faithful service – tends to be described in language that is individualistic. Bellah argues that this first language is impoverished – it leads to the breach. He then points out that we also have second languages – many of which are religious and theological – that have shaped our country and our experience, and that we need to recover these second languages in order to more meaningfully describe our lives together – we might say, to repair the breach. Examples of this second language include words and concepts like covenant and stewardship and vocation – sound familiar?!

As I read our Psalm for this morning, I began to think about how Bellah's challenge to recover second languages can be linked to the Biblical narrative. As people of faith, perhaps our primary task as repairers of the breach is to return to sacred texts that define a way of being and living that is life-giving and justice-focused – that leads us to watch for God's work in the world and how we are called to be co-creators of God's reign on earth. So here is my case study of recovering a language perhaps more adequate and faithful to our times – an old language, perhaps, but also a language that brings insight and clarity to our daily lives here at Augsburg.

If you pay attention to such things, you will know that the narrative of our Christian worship is very much linked to and based in the city of Jerusalem – the focus of Psalm 122. From the time that Jesus turns his ministry on the path to Jerusalem - to the grand entrance into the city with palms waving his way - to the tragic events of Holy Week, Jesus' last meal with his disciples, his arrest and appearances before the religious and secular leaders, culminating in his crucifixion on a hill just outside the city – to the experience of the empty tomb on Easter morning – to the appearances of the risen Christ to the faithful in upper rooms – to Christ's ascension – to the remarkable sending forth of the disciples to carry on ministry in Jesus' name on Pentecost – the city of Jerusalem is the backdrop and the context for this remarkable drama that we know as the heart of the gospel.

And it is striking to consider the dynamic that plays out in the sacred city. The city that calls strangers in. The city that welcomes with great pageantry. The city that is home to civic and religious leaders whose efforts often intersect and sometimes conflict. The city where feet are washed and bread is broken together. The city where disciples betray and deny their master. The city that crucifies its prophets. The city where redemption is glimpsed even when all seems lost. The city where friends huddle in fear, seeking evidence that their work is not in vain. The city that is the setting for remarkable diversity of language and culture. The city that sends its citizens forth to follow their calls of ministry and service in the world.

The city that is the place where both the worst and the best of human experience occur side by side. The city of paradox. The city that conspires and betrays and denies and crucifies – and the city that welcomes and aspires and redeems. The city – where God is present in the midst of all the paradox and messiness. "For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good."

This is Jerusalem, a city with abiding relevance to our lives of faith – a city of ancient and contemporary significance – and a city characterized by often messy intersections and tensions that illustrate for us the themes that play themselves each and every day right here in Cedar-Riverside and Minneapolis, in our city where we seek to be God's faithful people, where we are called to be repairers of the breach.

So what lessons might we take from Jerusalem that are of importance to our own lives at Augsburg here in Minneapolis? What is it about cities that we must understand as we seek to be God's faithful people in this place?

My first answer to that question is summed up in a familiar verse from the prophet Jeremiah: *But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare will you find your welfare.* (Jeremiah 29:7, RSV) The first thing we must do is embrace our responsibility, our common calling to care for the city, to love the city and seek its welfare. This is such an interesting challenge in the history of Augsburg. A few years back, I worked with Auggie Juve Meza on an URGO project that explored the history of Augsburg's relationship to its place and its neighbors. One of the things that Juve learned in his project is that Augsburg had a difficult relationship with its urban location for a significant part of its history – at one time, we seriously considered moving the campus to Richfield – and even when that effort failed, it was 30 or 40 years before Professor Joel Torstenson and his colleagues developed a framework for Augsburg's role in the city that sought to embrace the city as our home, as the place where we are authentically engaged in our mission-based work – this year, in fact, we celebrate the 50th anniversary of that transformative shift in Augsburg's life in the city. It can be difficult to love Jerusalem or Minneapolis when they betray and crucify, when they are fearful and dangerous places – but love them we must, Jeremiah reminds us, if we are to do God's work and find our own welfare. We are called to love the city with all of its tensions and messiness – and therein we will find our own redemption.

My second point about cities is that we must be open to their remarkable otherness – the diversity of friends and strangers alike – if we are to do God's work here. The Psalmist reminds us that "the tribes go up" to Jerusalem and only then is it a city that "is bound firmly together." I remember vividly one of my first forays into our neighborhood. I was shepherded through Cedar-Riverside by the legendary Mary Laurel True, whose cell phone number is on the walls of most Somali homes and businesses in our neighborhood – because they know she will help! Mary Laurel introduced me to good people whose lives and work intersects with the college. We sat in one of the mosques in the neighborhood and spoke with the elders about peace and the God of Abraham; about our lives here together in Cedar-Riverside; about our children and the aspirations we have that their lives will be meaningful and successful; about the world and how frightening it can be to live with strangers; about democracy and civil discourse. In other words, we spoke as fellow humans living together in the city. On Good Friday, Jesus died on the cross alongside common criminals – who, like all of us – have strayed from the path of righteousness and yet Jesus included them in his final prayers. On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came to the disciples in Jerusalem, giving them the wisdom and skills to engage with strangers of many languages and cultures, to pray together in new and strange vocabularies. Today, we live alongside of immigrants from far and wide who share our fears and our aspirations. In our diversity, God is at work and we are called to love these friends and strangers with whom we live in the city.

Finally, I believe that those who are called to God's work in the city must learn from the work of the late Jane Jacobs, the legendary urban theorist, whose *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*

(originally published in 1961) was a clarion call to arms for all those who loved the diversity and energy of cities that was being ravaged by trends in architecture and city planning. One of Jacobs' main points was that the well-being of cities is defined primarily by common, ordinary things. Common things like sidewalks, parks, defined neighborhoods, and a diversity of architecture styles and buildings of different ages. These common, ordinary things, when thought about with the needs and aspirations of citizens in mind, will create healthy, sustainable and vital urban centers. It is not about spending a huge amount of money, she warned, it is about "the innate abilities (of cities) for understanding, communicating, contriving and inventing what is required to combat their difficulties." It is about pageantry and ritual, about the small denials and acts of kindness, about meeting in upper rooms to wash each other's feet and break bread together, about the tensions of daily life where the religious and secular intersect and sometimes conflict, about talking with each other even when we don't understand, about being sent forth to do God's work even when it is not clear where the work will lead us. It is about, in other words, a reflective practice of city life – what we might call the genuine work of urban planning.

Jerusalem, Oh Jerusalem. We pray for your peace. Cedar-Riverside, Oh Cedar-Riverside. peace be within you. We are called to repair the breach, to stand with our neighbors, to embrace the diverse and ordinary and messy nature of our lives together. City of both the crucifixion and the resurrection. City of stranger and friend. City that calls us in and sends us forth. City that marks out our lives of faith now as it did millennia ago. City that reminds all of us that our welfare, our redemption, depends on how well we tend these sacred and holy streets and neighborhoods and neighbors. City that is our home – now and for life eternal. Thanks be to God. Amen.

>>Lives that speak<<

Here is an excerpt from my Honors Convocation address this spring.

The title for my address this afternoon is a play on a meaningful Quaker saying, "Let your life speak." In his book of the same title, educator and honorary Auggie Parker Palmer recounts his own vocational journey. Initially he interpreted "Let your life speak" to mean find the most inspiring causes and individuals in the world and seek to be like them. But after many epic fails at that pursuit, he instead comes to know that "Let your life speak" means to listen to your own values and gifts and passions so that yours might be the life you were intended to live – not someone else's. And therein is the turn I want to make in my remarks to you on this special occasion. Even as we gather here today to honor and celebrate you, I want to boldly proclaim that each of you has lived here among us with a life that has spoken loud and clear with exceptional intellect, hard work, and moral passion in the classroom, on campus, in the neighborhood and around the world. You honor us with your lives that speak.

So, what lessons have we learned from your lives that will continue to shape Augsburg into the future? I trust others gathered here will share why they believe you deserve to be honored, but here are four lessons I've gained from your good work here.

First, you've shown me over and over again how intellect and experience cannot be separated. You embody the 20th century educational philosopher John Dewey's idea that education is not preparation for real life, it is real life. I was with a group of our students in 2014 at our campus site in Cuernavaca, Mexico. We spent a couple of days visiting various sites – a bathing suit factory made possible by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), an indigenous village where the residents lived with unhealthy and unjust conditions. These were long and stressful days,

full of experiences that challenged our hearts and senses and minds. And I'll never forget the moment as we were about to leave the village after a wrenching and exhausting day when one of our students asked for reflection time. And even though a few of us groaned in our weariness, she didn't want to leave the experience she had just had – as difficult as it had been – without seeking to understand, to reflect upon, to integrate into her own thinking what she had just seen and done. This integration of theory and practice that is at the heart of an Augsburg education is not something to be taken for granted. I visit lots of other colleges and universities in my work, and students often comment that they feel "under a bubble" while in school there. There is no Augsburg bubble and we have you to thank for showing us what it means to be what MIT professor, Donald Schön, has called, "reflective practitioners," those who practice the art of linking reflection and experience in every aspect of your life.

You've also taught me how to love this place. The pride you have in this college and its place in the heart of the city is tangible in your spirit and t-shirts and good work to make this college and neighborhood even stronger. From the time you first arrived for SOAR and were assigned to a neighborhood, you have been stewards of this place in myriad ways. You have settled here and taken good care of what has been entrusted to us on this campus and in our neighborhood. There are tangible results of your stewardship of this place in a Campus Cupboard to meet the needs of your fellow students, in your engagement on behalf of lives that matter, in more and more attention to our carbon footprint, and the care you have taken to create a safer and more vibrant neighborhood. The novelist Wallace Stegner once wrote that the American psyche is in tension between what he calls "the boomers," those who go into a place, use it up and then leave – and "the stickers," those who settle in a place and work to renew it and make it better. You have taught me again the importance of "sticking," of staying and settling in. At Augsburg, we accompany and settle alongside our neighbors. We pursue education in this place, equipping each other for lives of meaning and purpose. We welcome each other in this place, sustaining a community of hospitality and mutual respect. We love and are faithful to this place that has been our home for almost 145 years.

And you've taught me not to be afraid of the other, the stranger. We live in a world of fear and violence and separation. We too often marginalize the stranger, retreating to what the late sociologist Robert Bellah called "our lifestyle enclaves," mingling with those with whom we share culture and skin color and income status, trying to find safety away from the uncomfortable, the unknown. But, of course – as you have taught us well – retreating doesn't work because the world only becomes more dangerous and polarized and frightened. Here at Augsburg you have lived into a community of hospitality and justice that embraces otherness and difference, that faces the tensions and complexities of diverse perspectives and experiences, that seeks to engage what political theorist Michael Walzer calls a "thick" sense of life together, not trying to minimalize our differences but calling them into dialogue and mutuality. Your class has been at the heart of this good work here at Augsburg and you've challenged all of us to face our privilege and biases and fears – and some days we get it right, on others we have so much more to learn – as we embrace the richness of life together in this remarkable community. The late priest Henri Nouwen described our aspirations this way:

> Hospitality is the creation of free space where a stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer space where change can take place ….The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create emptiness, not a fearful emptiness, but a friendly emptiness where strangers can enter and find themselves free; free

to sing their own songs, speak their own languages, dance their own dances; free to leave and follow their own vocations.

Finally, you've taught me to hope. For more than 35 years, I have worked at colleges and for all of the messiness that often passes for daily life on a campus, I come back each and every day because of the hope you inspire in all of us. It is hope despite the evidence on many days. When His Holiness, the Dalai Lama was with us in 2014 at the Nobel Peace Prize Forum, someone asked him a question about how he could continue to follow his path toward peace when the world was so violent and there was little evidence of a way forward. His response was quick – "What choice do I have? If I meditate on pessimism, I will die. If I meditate on optimism, I will live." It is not a naïve hope that you teach us – just wish for it and all will be well with the world. No, you are well-educated individuals, fully aware of the complexities and uncertainties of life in the world – in society, in our environment, in the cosmos even! And yet you hope and you get to work and good things happen. In this way you honor the world you will surely change – as you have changed us in this college.

PRACTICE THIS

>>The power of both/and<<

Here are some thoughts about an exciting change afoot at Augsburg!

"I am writing these notes on Commencement weekend when we have just sent the final graduates of Augsburg College into the world, full of promise and aspiration – as has been the case for almost 150 years. As you will read in this issue of *Augsburg Now*, the change of our name to Augsburg University will become official in September and we will welcome the first class on Labor Day weekend. We are busy preparing for this exciting new era for Augsburg!

For some, the name change may reflect a break with Augsburg's past. For others, perhaps this is a welcome acceptance of the need to embrace the future. For the Augsburg community, however, the change is a remarkable opportunity to re-present Augsburg to the world – to tell a story that is about an abiding mission and identity shaped by faith, academic and civic values, and at the same time to point to innovative and urgently needed responses to our dynamic environment. In other words, this change is about the pivot from "either/or" to "both/and." This is about embracing the best of past, present and future. This is about Augsburg University.

The almost 1000 new Auggies who commenced into the world this spring reflect in their achievements and aspirations the foundation for embracing this change.

Across both undergraduate and graduate programs, the class of 2017 achieved academic excellence of the highest order, excellence that defines a university. National and international honors for scholarship and service; exemplary undergraduate research that equips students for graduate work and professional opportunities; innovative community-building that strengthens democratic engagement; and a commitment to equity in education that promises to change the world.

At the same time, our newest graduates reflect the diversity that we expect in a university – diversity of ethnicity, thinking, life experience, identity and ability – diversity not for its own sake but for the promise of a more robust, healthy and just world. As I watched our diverse graduates cross the

stage, I could not help but be filled with hope in our future leaders who already have learned to navigate difference in ways that unite rather than divide.

In a final way, these newest Augsburg graduates offer a perhaps counter-cultural lesson about what makes for a great university. Though some imagine a university as big and bureaucratic and faceless, Augsburg has a vision to be a new kind of student-centered, urban university – small to our students and big for the world. The sense of community was palpable in our commencement ceremonies as graduates cheered each other and celebrated the relationships they have forged at Augsburg, life-long relationships that engendered achievement and success. And propelled by those relationships, our graduates will indeed be "big for the world," as they live Augsburg's mission as "informed citizens, thoughtful stewards, critical thinkers and responsible leaders."

Here's to the power of "both/and" and the promise of Augsburg University!'

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

Our commencement speaker and honorary degree recipient this spring was Michele Norris, former host of National Public Radio's All Things Considered. She is a delightful person and speaker. Her 2011 *The Silence of Grace: A Family Memoir* (Vintage Books) is a powerful read.

Our other honorary degree recipient was Beverly Daniel Tatum, president emerita of Spelman College and author of the groundbreaking *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria: And Other Conversations on Race* (Basic Books, 1997), which will be reissued in a 20th anniversary edition later this year.

We are working on a partnership between Augsburg and Dar-al-Kalima University in Bethlehem, whose president, Dr. Mitri Raheb, has recently published *The Cross in Contexts: Suffering and Redemption in Palestine* (with Suzanne Watts Henderson, Orbis Books, 2017).

>>The Summer Day<<

Here is a delightful poem from Mary Oliver that seems most fitting for this commencement season.

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean--
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down --
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.

I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
With your one wild and precious life?

--Mary Oliver

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>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

- Citizenship and work
- Chief strategy officers