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<<

I'm a bit tardy this issue as we have concluded our academic year with the usual flourish of campus activities, combined with the search for two important leadership positions – a Provost and a Vice President for Enrollment. A few crazy weeks! Thanks for your patience and your continued efforts to create and sustain communities of reflective practice.

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. The website version of Notes also includes helpful hyperlinks to sources for purchasing or subscribing to the various publications mentioned in Notes. 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

>>Neighbor love<<

[Scripture assigned: Philippians 2: 1-11]

This morning, I offer the fifth of five homilies reflecting on the charisms (or gifts) of our Lutheran Christian tradition that are at the core of our identity and work as a college. Previously, we have explored the theological concept of vocation, with its nuanced and narrative sense of a life unfolding as called; the promise of inquiry that is critical and humble, able to ask difficult and meaningful questions because God wants us to learn about all of creation; the engagement of otherness and difference in our lives, because there is in the diversity of God's creation the call to love each other as God loves each of us; and *semper reformanda*, our place in the reformation tradition and the commitment to loving reform of human institutions.

This morning, we turn to the call to be neighbor, the belief that we have been saved through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ so that we might accompany each other as neighbors in our journeys in this world. Here we affirm the belief that we have been freed, not so that we might do whatever we wish, but so that we might live for and with each other as neighbor. Here, surely, is a commitment at the heart of our life as a college of the church in this remarkable neighborhood and world.

And it could not be more meaningful to me to offer this word on our work as a college at the beginning of this Holy Week, these sacred days when we journey with our Lord through the final days of his life, through his death on the cross, to the tomb now empty, and then further on the road to Emmaus, where the Risen One is known in the breaking of bread.

Our text for this morning, assigned for yesterday (what we now call Passion Sunday) is to my mind one of the most powerful and poetic passages in all of scripture as it describes theologically what we might consider the ultimate act of human agency: the choice Jesus – though in the form of God – makes to empty himself, to not count equality with God a thing to be exploited, to humble himself unto death, even death upon the cross. And all of this so that every tongue shall confess Jesus as the Christ, the one sent from God to redeem the world. And this, as we read in the verses just before the theological formula, so that we – God's faithful – might be of the same mind, having the same love, looking not to our own interests, but to the interests of others. In other words, redeemed and called to be neighbor.

It is in the extravagant grace of the cross that we are called to lives of what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called in his 1962 speech "On Being a Good Neighbor," dangerous and excessive altruism, lives of love and peace in the face of hatred and violence, lives of abundance and promise in the face of scarcity and betrayal, lives of faith and courage in the face of anxiety and fear. Lives that turn the world on its head. Lives as neighbors to each other in a world of strangers.

Evidence of what this means for us here at Augsburg is found everyday here on campus, in our neighborhood and around the world. Being a neighbor – neighbor-love – takes many forms. In our Lutheran Christian tradition, these various ways of being neighbor are detailed in Martin Luther's many writings and sermons, and summarized elegantly by Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, a Lutheran theologian who teaches at Seattle University. Professor Moe-Lobeda suggests that for Luther, there are basically three forms of neighbor-love:

- The first is <u>service to the neighbor</u>, acts of kindness and charity and generosity, even if it requires sacrifice for me;
- The second is <u>disclosing and denouncing oppression and exploitation of the neighbor</u> who is vulnerable and needs to be empowered, the work of enabling our neighbor to live a full and rich life; and,
- The third is <u>living in ways that counter the cultural norms that exploit the vulnerable and defy God's intentions</u> for the world, the work of justice and peace-making (Moe-Lobeda, *Public* Church, p. 24).

I might paraphrase further by suggesting that the call to be neighbor for Luther means "becoming the hands and feet of Christ" as we serve, empower and struggle for peace and justice for all of God's creation. In this way, we are called to live faithfully with each other as neighbors, to heal the fractured world, to be the body of Christ here and now.

Now I have to say that I find all of this inspiring – surely Jesus (and the various other heroes and heroines of the faith) is a paragon of faithfulness and courage and love – and at the same time deeply troubling – how can I hope to live out my baptismal faith, my call to do God's work in the world, when confronted with the messiness of the world and the many difficulties and obstacles in my path?

I don't mean to be depressing, but there are real questions here for even the most faithful among us. And we must pay special attention to those questions, because they are the questions that you, our students, are asking, as you look out on a broken world. And I would suggest that they are questions all of us – God's faithful people in the world – need to ask as we consider what we have been called to be and do. How do we love our neighbor, how do we love the world, how do we live as the body of Christ, even when…?

But then I return to our lives together on this campus and in this neighborhood and my faith is renewed as I witness – as we all do – the remarkable ways in which our students love our neighbors – it's the main reason I come to work in the morning.

A couple of my favorite student stories – I apologize if you've heard them before – show how serving, empowering and struggling for justice for our neighbors is at the heart of our work as a college.

First, there is Mary (not her real name), a young student at first questioning her faith and purpose in the world, until she becomes active in our Campus Kitchens program, and begins to deliver and eat meals with our neighbors who are Somali immigrants—serving those in need. And then she is tutoring the Somali children, invited to meals in the nearby Riverside Plaza apartments with Somali families, even learning a bit of the Somali language—surely this is what it means to empower and to be empowered as she entered into a deep relationship with neighbors who do not share the same experiences or faith. And then after graduation she was off for a year in the Lutheran Volunteer Corps and then to further schooling so she can work to ensure justice for immigrants in the Twin Cities and beyond. Called to be neighbor.

And then there is Steven, a student out in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood with a group of us doing a service project, and I see him watching a Somali woman in traditional Muslim garb, toting a suitcase, attempting (and failing) to get a cab to stop and pick her up. Now, as I reflect on this scene, I can imagine a variety of responses from Steven. He simply could have kept on with his valuable service work and left the woman to fend for herself. He could have stood and watched as the neutral observer, gathering data for his research, waiting to see if a cab would stop or if someone else would help the woman. Or he could do what he did, which was to cross the street, to engage the woman in conversation, to offer his help, to make sure she was safe on the sidewalk, to step into the street and hail the cab himself, and then to ensure that the woman was safely in the taxi with instructions to the driver to take her to the airport.

He acted with neighbor-love – love that builds up – and through his act of love, he connected with another of God's people and learned important lessons about the experiences of his neighbors, about his own life of power and privilege, about what God intends for God's people. Through his act of love, he gained knowledge that is the foundation for serving the neighbor and the neighborhood, the foundation for striving for justice and compassion, the foundation for seeking to change policies and behaviors, the foundation for faithful discipleship. Called to be neighbor.

As we embark upon our Holy Week journeys over the next few days, may we know the remarkable faithfulness and courage of our Lord and Savior, the Word become flesh, who was sent by God to redeem the world God loves so much. May we be of the same mind during these sacred days as we hear once again the call to be neighbor and to heal the world; the call to serve, empower and seek justice for all of God's creation; and the call to be a community of the faithful who are the hands and feet of Christ, the only body of Christ in the world here and now. Thanks be to God. Amen.

>>Peace I leave with you<<

This is an excerpt of my sermon at our annual Baccalaureate service earlier this month. It was an especially appropriate theme for our new graduates.

[Scripture assigned, John 14: 23-29]

…And so God does have a plan for us. Just as God had a plan for Peter and James and John; for Paul and Miriam and Tabitha – disciples all. A plan that our teacher(s) have prepared us to live out. A vocational plan, if you will – a call to love and serve. A call to follow even when – like for disciples throughout the ages – the stakes are high, the rewards perhaps uncertain, the terrain uncharted, the future murky at best. You're not alone with these vocational feelings!

"Where I am going," Jesus tells his disciples elsewhere in the gospel of John, "you cannot come." But you will not be alone. I leave you this new commandment, by which the world will know that you are my disciples. "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." By this, they will know that you are mine, if you have love for one another. You are known by how you love – how you love God, each other, and God's good world. You're as ready as you're going to be. You've been called…

And now what?

And now, Jesus says, I leave you with my peace. I give you my peace. And so he does for all of us who believe. In our gospel for this morning, I find two distinct ways in which God's peace makes a difference for our lives of faith in the world.

First, we have the peace that centers us and calls us home. Hear this lovely opening verse in John 14: "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." What power there is in those words for the journey ahead!

One of the great myths the world seeks to impose on us in our lives is the sense that we must learn to "balance" all of the competing claims we will face. The balanced life demands keeping work and family, private and public, personal and common in some sort of eternal symmetry. Perhaps you are thinking about this challenge right now as you set forth into your lives in work places and graduate schools, in your families and your neighborhoods. You will long to find the balance in your lives that makes all right with the world. But to this futile longing, Jesus offers us all the gospel word of peace that calls this longing for balance into question. What if, instead, we learned to live in a way that is out of balance, leaving us to rely instead on the pull of a force and power that draws us in and centers us in our home, in our loving God.

This is the peace that Jesus offers as he calls us home to our good and gracious God. This is the centered life, as our Augsburg colleague Jack Fortin teaches us, not the balanced life. Balance is our human longing – surely if we get our lives in balance, all will work out, all will be well. We've all been there in this eternal quest for balance in our lives. But these attempts at balance distract us from what God calls us to be and do. Balance is the wrong metaphor for the life of faith (not to mention it is impossible to achieve) – instead, the center holds us in God's orbit…and the peace Jesus leaves us with centers us in God. And centered in God, we suspend our efforts to make everything work out, to pursue what we believe we deserve, to rely on the opinions of others to measure our worth in the world. Centered in God, we lean expectantly into what God intends for

us to do as partners in the work of making new things happen. Surely that is a gift worth celebrating as we leave with the peace that brings us home to our true center.

And there – in that center – we are offered the second gift of peace, the peace, as Jesus tells us in verse 27 that is not given as the world gives. In other words, this is a peace that passes human understanding, that calls into question the ways of the world that are based on competition and fear of failure and doing all it takes to get ahead. Instead, this peace points us back to the lessons we learn from Jesus' ministry in the world, to lessons about justice and compassion and healing, to a focus on our neighbor and his or her needs rather than our own. God's peace casts aside our fears and ambitions so we can focus on our neighbor, on the needs of strangers that claim us to be hospitable, to do justice, to pay attention to the call to love without condition.

And with that peace, your life will change forever – <u>our</u> lives will change forever as we seek to do God's work in the world.

The great Lutheran theologian, Joseph Sittler, in his sermon "Peace as Rest and as Movement" points to the fact that the peaceless world "is precisely the place for the working out of God's will for truth, justice, purity, beauty." Similarly, Martin Luther King, Jr. proclaims: "Let us realize the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice." We lean into an arc already making its way in the world, a plan already unfolding, justice demanded, love already breaking in, and there we find glimpses of salvation and grace in our midst. If we are distracted or even blinded by our longing, we will miss the remarkable signs of God's will for us that are ours as we live in God's peace and expectation into the arc of God's reign.

The 20th century theological moralist, H. Richard Niebuhr, challenged the traditional images of humans as moral agents in charge of their own destinies or as followers of the law, when he developed an ethics of responsibility, suggesting that the appropriate role for moral agents is as responders to God's creative and redemptive work in our history. What is God doing in our midst, what is God teaching us in the gospel, what is God calling us to be and do? Leaving with God's peace prepares us to respond to God's work in the world, to become co-creators, to follow the call, to be signs of what God expects of God's faithful people. The chief rabbi of London, Jonathan Sacks, has suggested in his own description of an ethics of responsibility that we are called by God to "heal the world." This is what God intends for God's world.

To leave with God's peace challenges our notions of what it means to be called. On this special day when we celebrate your remarkable accomplishments in the college, we learn that to be called does not mean some dogged pursuit of what makes us happy, it means accepting God's peace, leaning expectantly into the arc of God's love breaking in and accepting what it means for our lives, here and now, as frightening and dangerous and adventurous and awesome as the call may be.

I think of the sometimes daunting and frightening and awesome and remarkable calls you must follow as we prepare to send you out into the world – to do as God needs for you to do, to make peace in your lives, in your families, faith communities, neighborhoods and in the world, to be reconciled with our God and neighbors far and wide. And I have turned to these wonderful lines, first written by Polish Rabbi Nachman, which sum up for me what it means to live with God's peace and lean into the arc of God's reconciling love for faithful people who live in the real world:

Nothing is as whole as a heart that has been broken.

All time is made up of healing of the world.

Return to your ships, which are your broken bodies.

Return to your ships, which have been rebuilt.

[after Rabbi Nachman of Breslav; from *Kaddish*, Lawrence Siegel]

We're in good and gracious company – called by our gracious God, who has rebuilt our ships, who has redeemed our lives so that we might heal the world, so that we might leave with the peace of Christ, so that we might join in God's loving and reconciling and justice-filled work for the world.

We want so much – we, just like the disciples some 2000 years ago, are anxious and long to know that our lives have meaning and purpose – and Jesus recognizes and names our fear while he also calls us to abandon our longing, to give up our aspirations to make sense of it on our own – heart-wrenching stuff. Here is your home, your center; and there is the world that God loves so much. Can we learn to lean expectantly into the love that knows no bounds, the peace that passes all understanding, the hope that abides in our God who has made all things new? Leave now with Christ's peace and know that God is about to do a new thing in you. And God's people say together, Amen.

PRACTICE THIS

>>Reframing organizations<<

I often return to Lee Bolman and Terry Deal's *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* (Jossey-Bass, 4th edition, 2008) for guidance in not over-simplifying organizational dynamics and challenges.

Bolman and Deal outline a holistic way of diagnosing and responding to organizational issues, reminding all of us that our attempts to control and predict what happens in organizations are futile—all we can do (in fact, what we must do!) is seek to understand what really is happening and help organizations navigate their circumstances. Bolman and Deal suggest that there are at least four lenses or frames through which we must view life in organizations, and that these various frames help us gain a more accurate picture of organizational dynamics. And better diagnosis gives us the best opportunity for appropriate and effective responses.

Think of your own organization as you consider the four frames:

(1) The structural frame--structure means various things, including division of labor, how jobs are defined, policies and procedures for staff and board, budgets, the steps we take to achieve goals and objectives, etc.

(2) The human resources frame--human resources includes the fit between individual and organizational needs, how people are treated in the workplace, how people are held accountable, how collaboration and teamwork is promoted, etc.

(3) The political frame—politics include the role and forms of power, the way in which conflict is managed, how you organize forums and processes by which scarce resources are divided, how coalitions are built, etc.

(4) The symbolic frame--symbols include the rituals of our organization's life, how heroes and heroines are identified and celebrated, what comprises your organizational culture, what stories you tell and don't tell to depict the meaning of your work, etc.

The key issue in using the frames is that we must not assume that a specific incident is adequately understood by viewing it through one frame only. When a new program isn't going well and we are tempted to reengineer its structure, think also about the fit between program staff and purpose, about the power issues at play, about the symbolism of the program—you may still want to reorganize (a structural response), but the holistic view of organizations may help you see alternative ways of making things work.

>>Strategic questioning<<

Our current strategy work has illustrated for me again the critical role of asking the right questions. Here is a short piece I originally wrote 14 years ago that outlines how good strategic questions move conversations forward.

Since strategy is a critical aspect of organizational mission and integrity, I commend the practice of strategic questioning as a means to help us and our colleagues find our way through change with a sense of values and direction. The "Key Nonprofit Strategist" (Volume 6, No. 1, Winter 2000) distributed by Key Asset Management, refers to the work of Tova Green, Peter Woodrow, and Fran Peavey, in whose "Insight and Action: How to Discover and Support a Life of Integrity and Commitment to Change" (New Society Publishers, Philadelphia), we learn that strategic questions involve seven key factors:

(1) They create motion. "How can we move?"
(2) They create options. Instead of asking a question that includes only one or two predetermined options, we ask instead "What would like you to do?" or "What are the four or five things you might want to do?"
(3) They dig deeper. Dynamic questions open people up to explore issues in a deeper and more expansive way.
(4) They avoid "Why?" "Why" questions force respondents to justify current practice or an existing decision. Instead of asking "Why don't you come up with a plan to change that program?" ask "What keeps you from making plans to change that program?"
(5) They avoid yes or no answers. Life is seldom so simple.
(6) They are empowering. A question like "What would it take for you to change on that issue?" helps to enable us to create paths for change.
(7) They ask the unaskable. A strategic question—grounded in a values-oriented approach to change—asks the tree activist, for example, "How should we make building materials?"

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

The last couple of issues of my Notes have included portions of my essay, "Fundraisers and the Good Life," which now has been published as the lead article in *Nonprofit Fundraising Strategy: A Guide to Ethical Decision Making and Regulation for Nonprofit Organizations*, edited by Janice Gow Pettey (John Wiley and Sons, 2013). The book is a great guide to helping individuals and organizations become reflective practitioners around ethical issues.

I had the privilege to be with Dorothy Bass and Mark Schwehn at our church this month – their daughter belongs to the congregation – and I was reminded of their powerful collaboration on *Leading Lives That Matter: What We Should Do and Who We Should Be* (Wm. B. Eerdman's, 2006), a compilation of readings on vocation and meaningful lives in the world. It makes for significant person reflection as well as a guide to community reflections.

>>To be of use<<

The Bass/Schwehn volume includes this evocative poem by Marge Piercy entitled "To be of use," which seems a fitting benediction for this academic year as we send our graduates into the world. May we all find work that is real!

To be of use

The people I love the best
jump into work head first
without dallying in the shallows
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.

They seem to become natives of that element,
the black sleek heads of seals
bouncing like half submerged balls.
I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,
who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,
who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,
who do what has to be done, again and again.

I want to be with people who submerge
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest
and work in a row and pass the bags along,
who stand in the line and haul in their places,
who are not parlor generals and field deserters
but move in a common rhythm
when the food must come in or the fire be put out.

The work of the world is common as mud.
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.
But the thing worth doing well done
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums
but you know they were made to be used.
The pitcher cries for water to carry
and a person for work that is real.

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>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

- Reinventing governance
- Small and big at the same time – a 21st century vision