A stage with a spotlight on a stool and a microphone stand. The stool is on the left, and the microphone stand is on the right. The background is dark with a spotlight effect.

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Dear friends in Christ,

It is with great pleasure that I pass along this year's edition of the ACYTI journal. You will find wonderful insights in these essays written by fine theologians. We had an incredible week together exploring ways our congregations can form faith beyond the church walls. We experimented with ways of reading our neighborhoods, ways of reading scripture in our neighborhoods, ways of discerning God's call for our communities and ways of proclaiming God's good news into the lives of our neighbors and our neighborhoods. Our faith was challenged and affirmed throughout the week. We grew quite close as a Christian community and I am excited for you to have this opportunity to learn from the wisdom that this public Christian community has generated.

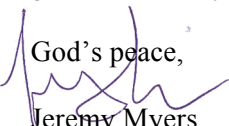
The first three essays offer an overview of our week. *Katie Hobart* summarizes the art of public faith, which was our primary content for the week. *Emily Hackerson* offers a creative comparison and contrast of how discipleship is described in the four gospels. We were seeking a new way of being public disciples together during our week. *Abigail Norman* uses the image of water from our theme verses in Ezekiel to explain how God's living water flows to us and then moves us beyond the church walls into our communities where we become this same living water for others.

The next three essays explore our call to the marginalized. *Juliet White* argues that Christianity's hope in unconditional love should be our motivation to fully accept those in the LGBT+ community. *Sophia Stout* works to understand the source of discrimination and how the Christian community might play a role in dismantling the powers that cause and perpetuate discrimination. *Sarah Wyatt* reminds us that Jesus was most interested and concerned for the marginalized people of his day and we, as the body of Christ, are called to be in relationship with the marginalized today.

The following three essays all wrestle with the realities of suffering and doubt. They see these things not as contrary to a life of faith, but central to it. *William Mauch* wants us to understand faith as something more than assurance and hope, but also as something that consists of suffering and doubt, which must always be challenged. *Haley Renner* warns us of the dangers of triumphalism and seeks to define faith as its antithesis. *Christine Siebels-Lindquist* tackles the subject of God's relationship to suffering and evil, offering hope in a relational God who does not cause suffering but is present with and for us in its midst.

The last three essays pick up topics covered during our week together and seek to understand them more fully. *Mickaela Pasch* conducts an experiment to understand how context shape our interpretations of scripture and calls us to work at understanding where others are coming from who might interpret scripture differently. *Theo Tollefson* compares and contrasts a theology of the cross and a theology of glory and even brings Star Wars and politics into the conversation. *Heidi Jenkins* compares and contrasts Islam and Christianity and calls for more partnerships between these communities.

I am extremely proud of these young scholars and the work they present here. Three suggestions as you move forward: (1) enjoy these amazing essays, (2) learn more about our new degree program in Theology and Public Leadership and send students to Augsburg College for this major, and (3) nominate a 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grader for next year's Augsburg College Youth Theology Institute.

God's peace,  
  
Jeremy Myers

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## Instruments of God's Food & Healing

Katie Hobart, Wichita, Kansas

Are we doing all we can to be with our neighbors in their suffering and help them where they need it? Or are we comfortably reaching out from within the walls of our churches, assuming we know how to help our neighbors without communicating with them? Each congregation needs to consider these questions in order to determine whether it is effectively doing God's work, or passively "helping" without actually getting involved. We cannot be passive in our serving when we serve a God who is continually active in our lives and in our world. God flows into us, feeding and healing us so that we may be instruments of feeding and healing for others. We are called to be good neighbors through these acts, following Jesus' lead by being fearless in our serving of our communities.

Each day of ACYTI, we studied a chunk of our theme passage for the week, Ezekiel 47:1-12. The passage details how a river flowed from the temple to the Dead Sea, bringing life anywhere it flowed, and we discussed how this passage can be interpreted as a guide for public faith. Just as the river brought life to the dead areas it encountered, the Good News - that Jesus' death and resurrection brings life to the broken parts of our lives - restores each of us. The passage goes on to describe fruit trees lining the river, stating that "...every month they will bear fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them." (Ezekiel 47:12, NIV). As the Good News fills and fixes our brokenness, we are renewed so that we may in turn spread the Good News among our neighbors. The trees' "fruit will serve for food, and their leaves for healing." (Ezekiel 47:12, NIV), and we should do the same, using the Good News to displace the "bad news" our neighbors face.

Douglas John Hall's *The Cross in Our Context* explores the Theology of the Cross and what it means for us as disciples of Christ in a world full of injustice, war, and turmoil. Through the Theology of the Cross we see that God meets all of us in our suffering, an idea that contradicts the historical tendency to portray God as one who is indifferent to the suffering of God's people. As disciples of a God who is among God's people in their suffering, we are called to meet our neighbors in their suffering. Though we may have a "preference for security and peace" (Hall 54) that attempts to confine us within the comfort of our churches, "we, through 'our baptism into *his* death' (Rom. 6:1f), are being directed toward the world where *his* life is being lived" (Hall 41). Though God is certainly present in the church, Jesus was constantly accompanying his people in their own settings during his lifetime, and so should we. Though we can't perform miracles as Jesus did, theologian Mark Thomsen, in his book *Christ Crucified*, claims that "compassionate involvement in the 'suffering least' within the flesh and blood of physical existence is the essential dimension of the mission of God." (Thomsen 16). Simply accompanying our neighbors and offering food or healing through what we as humans have to offer, is enough. By being with others in their suffering and coming to understand their "bad news", we are able to discern what kind of "food" and healing they may need in their lives.

One of the most important parts of being an instrument of feeding and healing among neighbors is being in conversation with them in order to do that discernment. Since one's "bad news" differs from person to person, we must recognize that the good news each person needs varies as well. Instead of assuming that we know the suffering of our neighbors and how we can help them, we need to accompany them and listen to what they have to say in order for our

feeding and healing to have positive effects. Each day of ACYTI, we had the opportunity to meet people who, through conversations and observations, had discerned a need in their community and started programs in order to fulfill that need. Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Minneapolis started Exodus Lending, a non-profit organization that combats payday lending, after a payday loan store opened just down the street. Through conversations with many community members, Holy Trinity discerned a need to fight against corrupt, predatory payday lenders, and does so through providing payday borrowers a way out of payday lending traps. Shobi's Table, a food truck that serves a free lunch each Thursday, accompanied by a worship service, feeds its community in St. Paul both literally (through food) and spiritually (through community and worship). Shobi's Table aims to fulfill the needs of a community where many encounter a lack of access to healthier food, transportation to faith communities, and opportunities to participate in meaningful community. The leaders who started Exodus Lending and Shobi's Table listened to their neighbors in order to create sources of feeding and healing that worked to displace the specific "bad news" that their communities faced. When we proclaim the Good News in a way that displaces each person or group's unique "bad news", we are the sources of "food" and healing we are called to be.

Another important aspect of feeding and healing others is recognizing that we all have areas our lives where we need to be fed and healed. We cannot be continuous sources of feeding or healing if we are hungry and broken. Although both going out into the world to serve others and opening yourself up to receive help from others can be uncomfortable and slightly scary sometimes, all people deserve to be fed and healed. We need to be fed and healed in order to go out and do God's work to the best of our abilities. If we are not being fed and healed while feeding and healing others, it could be damaging to us, as well as limiting how effective we are in helping others.

The theme of the week, "Jesus Has Left the Building", had us look at how Jesus lived out his faith publicly through serving and being among his neighbors, and challenged us to do the same in our own lives, both individually and in our congregations. Accompanying our neighbors in their suffering in order to determine their "bad news", and discerning how the Good News can displace that bad news, may push some congregations and individuals out of their comfort zones. However, it is what we, as disciples of a God who suffers with us, are called to do. God never promises comfort in being a disciple, but instead gives us knowledge of the Good News, which calls us to leave our church buildings regardless of discomfort in order to proclaim it. By reaching out to our neighbors around us, being in community with them, and learning of how they need to be fed and healed, we take the good that God has poured into us and use it how it is meant to be used: for others.

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## **The Gospels According to...**

Emily Hackerson, Rosemount, MN

In the beginning there were twelve, now more than 2 billion people identify with the Christian faith. These first followers of Jesus set the example for future generations to practice the theology of the cross, proving there is no need to broadcast your faith in order to be considered a person of faith. Each disciple developed a different relationship with Jesus while learning the ways of his servant leadership. Although many biblical and modern followers of Jesus Christ hold the title “disciple” or “follower” in common, the type of relationship Jesus’ followers have with him differ both in nature and practice when compared side by side. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John show these differing relationships, and how each of these specific disciples believe we as Christians are called to serve our community. The Gospels also show the end goal of discipleship is *always* a better world for all of God’s people, not just one.

The New Testament of the Bible begins with the Gospels, the first of which being the gospel of Matthew. The author of this Gospel quickly sets the tone of their version of events with a detailed genealogy of Jesus’ family. This academic voice continues throughout the whole of this “teaching gospel” exemplified by Matthew’s description of Jesus’ first public act as, “major didactic discourses”, meaning important sermons (Troftgruben, 388-389). Matthew also describes a seemingly cyclical formation of discipleship: disciples are taught, and therefore called to teach others, so they in turn can teach the next generation. This teacher and pupil relationship also becomes evident when Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, ““this, then, is how you should pray:” which leads into the Lord’s Prayer (New International Version Bible, Matt. 6.9). The disciples are also prompted to “love your neighbor as yourself,” which is known as one of the greatest commandments (New International Version Bible, Matt. 22.39). Both of these lessons call the disciples to reach out into the community and teach God’s ways by including and loving everyone. As disciples of Christ we are called to proclaim the ways of Jesus, not necessarily through word, but teaching by example. Jesus taught his people to be servant leaders, something we are all called to be. Teach not for glory, but to make the world a better place.

Following the academic voice of Matthew, the gospel of Mark informs the world about Jesus as a storyteller. To Mark, Jesus acts as God’s servant. While Matthew focused on the genealogy of Jesus, the beginning of Mark focuses on John the Baptist's proclamation of the coming Messiah. As his first public act in the gospel of Mark, Jesus drives an evil spirit out of a person, leaving the people, “all so amazed” (New International Version Bible, Mark. 1.27). This exorcism takes place on the sabbath, traditionally designated for rest and devotion to God, so Jesus casting out an evil spirit was not only a strange sight, it was also breaking deeply rooted tradition. Through this story, Mark illustrates prioritizing helping others over tradition. If a tradition doesn’t allow you to make the world a better place, that specific tradition may need reexamining and adjusting. Following the tone set by the first public act, much of the gospel of Mark focuses on empathy and healing, especially for the poor and less fortunate, who through much of history have been looked down upon. Jesus finds these people and praises them for their contribution, heals them, and forgives their transgressions. Through the stories of Mark we can see as followers of Jesus we are called to serve our entire community, even if it feels against our

tradition. In reality our tradition is that of a God who sent his servant to show us how to love everyone, no matter who they are.

The third gospel, the gospel of Luke, introduces Jesus as mortal, a son of man. The first two chapters in the gospel of Luke foretell the births of two major biblical figures, John the Baptist and Jesus. By emphasizing *both* of these people are born human, we are able to see Jesus as the son of God taking a truly mortal form. The gospel of Luke is also the only gospel to include a story from when Jesus was still a boy, this again displaying Jesus' humanity. Luke allows us a glimpse into the lives of Jesus' family, before Jesus became the great teacher and preacher. This boyhood story allows the followers of Jesus to see family was a healthy and loving family with "real feelings, emotions, cares and sometimes confusion" about the future and Jesus' true calling (Servidio, Jesus' Childhood, Life, Hope & Truth). Luke also shows us Jesus' mortal flaws which are all present in each of us. Luke tells the story of Jesus being tempted in the desert, "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil" (New International Version Bible, Luke. 4.1-2). Many people today are haunted by seemingly omnipresent temptations, whatever they may be. Luke shows us Jesus as a peer, a person going through some of the same struggles we go through. Through his humanity, Jesus shows us we *can* work through our struggles. Luke calls us as humans to help each other in our struggles, and celebrate with others in our successes.

The final of the four gospels is the gospel of John. Where Matthew saw Jesus as a teacher, Mark saw Jesus as God's servant, and Luke saw Jesus as a son of man sent to do God's work, John sees Jesus as the one and only Son of God. As seen in the previous gospels, the tone of the book is set within the first few stories. The first public act included by John, besides calling disciples (which is included in each gospel), is the story of Jesus turning water to wine, a true miracle (New International Version Bible, John. 2). Throughout the Bible wine often symbolizes the blood of Christ, now used during Holy Communion. These symbolic stories continue throughout the entirety of the gospel. John's symbolic version of events culminate in the belief of Jesus being referred to as the long promised "lamb of God" who came to Earth to save us from sin, a belief held tightly by the Christian faith since the beginning of the faith itself (White, The Gospel of John, PBS). This unconditional love God shows by sending his son is described by one of the most famous bible verses, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life," (New International Version Bible, John. 3.16). By sending us his son in the flesh, God has called us all to be believers, to believe in him just as John did. As humans, we cannot possibly understand all of God's ways, but John has called us to believe and trust in God's word.

The word disciple seems to belong in history books or the Bible, but most Christians can be considered disciples. We may not be physically following Jesus' steps like the first twelve, but whether we view him as a teacher, servant of God, Son of man, Son of God, or some combination, God loves us and wants us to do right by others. He wants us to do right by everyone, despite our perceived differences, religious or otherwise. Our job as disciples is not to *tell* people about Jesus, our purpose is to *serve* our world and make it a better place for everyone. God calls us to love one another, and each gospel exemplifies this servant leadership, and the necessity to erase discrimination. Today the world faces problems the first twelve probably wouldn't be able to imagine, but if we can show the world around us the same love the first twelve showed the world around them, we will be on our way to a more accepting and harmonious world.



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## God's Good Water

Abigail Norman, Tomahawk, WI

Growing up in the Northwoods of Wisconsin, I am surrounded by God's creation, but more specifically the abundant lakes and rivers. Many people come to this area to enjoy God's Creation, especially to fish, boat, and ski on the waters. Because of the abundance of water that surrounds me, I take it for granted. Many Bible stories refer to water, for example, Ezekiel 47:1-12. I believe that the symbolism of the water in the text of Ezekiel 47:1-12 can be interpreted in two different ways: the water as a force of good that affects us and how people can be "the water".

The water that flows out from the temple acts as a force of good, creating new beginnings, nourishment, and life where it was not before. Quite literally in Ezekiel, the river freshens the stagnant water and provides creatures with life, men with fish, and trees that have fruit without fail for food and healing (Ezekiel 47:8-12). This river's symbolism, however, extends beyond the physical trees and creatures in the stories of Ezekiel. The fruit trees, may not be only fruit trees, "but are a figure of righteous men who produce good works that will heal the nations" (Woods). The river is God's force of good, the glory of the LORD (Ballard), bringing life to those who need it most. Often times, the majority of the people that need God's good are the ones outside the temples. For example, our church hosts a weekly, non-denominational worship service during the summer on Lake Nokomis for anyone who believes and wants to receive the "living water."

If you look at the history of Jesus' healings, most of them occur outside the temple and happen to those people deemed unworthy by many devout "Christians." How fitting to come to a "well", get healed, and become a source of life (water) to others. Jesus is the prime example for all Christians as we need to extend our ministry beyond the church walls. For, if our ministry is contained in a building, it will become stagnant like the waters cited in Ezekiel. Our God is a God of acceptance, one who can't be contained and goes out to be with his people.

In the second interpretation of Ezekiel, the water as a force of good provides an example for "all" believers to go out and be that force of good.

"Look, we too are caught in the river, flowing from the throne of God and Christ the Lamb.

We too thirst for God's abundant life as we drink deep of our baptismal waters.

We too are swept out the doors of the church in Jesus' beautiful river to bring life to the world.

Let everyone who thirsts, come to the waters!

Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift." (Lind- Ayres)

In other words, we as people are to be the waters of God that bring life and good to the world. It is not as if there will be a magic "poof" and everything will be made good by God. God works through our hands. In my community, my church can be an example of the water flowing out of the temple and people being the water. My church is very involved with programs giving food to poor children and the local food pantry, planting and maintaining a community garden, lending space to programs like Salvation Army and AA, supporting the Lekubu Parish in South Africa,

and hosting a Christmas dinner for those who are alone on Christmas. They also provide many opportunities to “be the water” and to help make a difference through programs and activities like Salvation Army bell ringing, raking leaves for elderly, and sending people to Guatemala and Africa to help with building schools. Additionally, they make efforts to include children and adults in activities, services, and even provide communion no matter if they are unchurched or are from a different denomination. While the church building provides the space and organization to accomplish great things, it is important to note that a “church” really is individuals, who are the “water.” Alone, most individuals do not have the powers of churches to host programs, conduct mission work, and sponsor fellowship activities the churches do, but they certainly can make a difference by themselves and involving churches together, as I learned in “The Art of Public Faith”(Myers). In “The Art of Public Faith”, there are four steps to initiate changes: 1. Accompaniment, involves assessing our neighbors and neighborhood and how they experience hope and despair. 2. Interpretation, wherein we must ask ourselves, “What did we witness? What did the good and bad look like? How do we interpret what we’ve seen based on our faith?” 3. Discernment, in which we must decide what God is calling us to be and do and who needs the proclamation of Good News; 4. Proclamation, we must decide how, when, and where to proclaim the Good news and determine how our neighbor will be involved in this proclamation (Myers).

I believe that the symbolism of the water in the text of Ezekiel 47:1-12 can be interpreted where the water is a force of good that affects us and how people can be the water. The church building provides the lake, where waters gather, but it’s the individuals that are the “church” and carry the living “water” along the current. They make God’s good works happen outside of the temple to those who need it. It inspires us to be moving water like the river and not a stagnant pool that just goes to church on Sundays. I want to be an example to others about being God’s river and spreading his good. I hope to accomplish this by doing mission trips and finding ways for my church to reach out into the community and extend beyond the four walls and what is currently being done. I think the Prayer of St. Francis (or The Peace Prayer) sums up how I feel best:

"Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
Where there is injury, pardon;  
Where there is doubt, faith;  
Where there is despair, hope;  
Where there is darkness, light;  
Where there is sadness, joy.  
O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek  
To be consoled as to console,  
To be understood as to understand,  
To be loved as to love;  
For it is in giving that we receive;  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
It is in dying to self that we are born to eternal life."

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## **Love Is All You Need**

Juliet White, Bloomington, MN

Imagine a man. He is walking down the street avoiding other's glances because he knows what they'd think if they knew the truth. He is gay. He is afraid to look up, to look in the eyes of those around him, and be who he is inside because he is scared of what everyone will say. He shouldn't have to be afraid. There are lots of opinions on LGBTQ+ rights. Many Christians credit the bible as the reason for disliking the community. That shouldn't be the case. The Bible's promotion of unconditional love should motivate the Christian community to accompany the LGBTQ+ community and use discipleship to overcome ignorance and discrimination.

Christians need to accompany the LGBTQ+ community. To accompany means to learn about our neighbors instead of making assumptions about them, to ask what they need instead of deciding for them. When we accompany, we love our neighbors for who they are not who we think they should be. If we accompany the LGBTQ+ community, we can use our unconditional love and support, making them feel safe. This verse says it all:

“Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering. Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’” (Hebrews 13:1-5, NIV)

Our job is to love everyone not judge them. If God can love us flaws and all, how can we not love each other?

Everyone has an opinion on the rights of the LGBTQ+ community no matter what religion. With Christians though, there is a lot of personal tension as well as communal tension due to the way many Christians interpret the Bible. Even in the Christian community people have different viewpoints. There are many different Bible verses that contradict each other and that can make it hard for some Christians to decide what their views are; sometimes even causing people to question their faith entirely. Some Christians say the Bible is very clear that being gay is unacceptable quoting passages like, “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable” (Leviticus 18:22, NIV) and

“Because of this God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error. Since they did not think to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind.” (Romans 1:26-28, NIV).

When people don't take the whole Bible into consideration and instead pick out parts, they are using Tradition (taking what other people say and what has been passed down between generations and using that to interpret the Bible) instead of Scripture (the pure text as written in the Bible). It is so easy to understand how much pull Tradition has over Scripture. Think about how much of our lives are fueled by other people's influence. We as Christians need something to pull us away from that kind of variable influence, so we can make a positive impact on those around us.

What that something is and what the Bible promotes more than anything is unconditional love. An example of unconditional love is found in this verse: "The entire law is summed up in a single command 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Galatians 5:14, NIV). Why do people think they are allowed to tell others they are right or wrong? Why do some people get to freely love who they want to love or be who they want to be, but some don't? Some Christians say that we have to believe in the Bible one hundred percent and follow its teachings, then we will know the truth. However, nobody can one hundred percent of the time say they are practicing ALL of the teachings in the bible, even if they say they do, because it is impossible. So, instead of telling LGBTQ+ people that they are wrong, that they are sinners, or condemned to hell, why not use unconditional love? It is said in the Bible, "There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you- who are you to judge your neighbor?" (James 4:12, NIV) Why do we feel we have the right to take on God's power? If homosexuality were bad, then let God do the condemning. We should follow His rule and love everyone. If you are a Christian who doesn't believe homosexuality is acceptable, you can still love somebody and not agree with certain choices they make in life. It is a part of human nature to question God's word, but we need to try and love our neighbor.

As this world modernizes and more people are starting to show the world who they really are, we as Christians need to stop talking and start doing. Jesus is remembered as much for his actions as he was for his words. Even though most of our actions will never be as great as healing a man with Leprosy or helping a blind man see, we can do something. Christians need to use discipleship and go into the community, healing the relationships we have with the LGBTQ+ people.

More often than not in the online world, some Christians try to take action by putting misguided information into the media causing people to say Christians are wrong because they "hate" gay people. This is becoming discriminatory against the Christians that do love gay people and believe that homosexuality is okay. By using our discipleship we can go out into the community and use accompaniment to not only salvage our relationship with this group of people, but we can try and combat the ignorance that some Christians have about these topics. There are Christians that discriminate and say that they are discriminating in the name of God. In doing this, they are going against the very religion that they aim to protect. This ignorance and discrimination that we find in our own Christian faith is making us a disliked community. If we truly love our neighbors, this discrimination wouldn't exist.

The words unconditional love are powerful but straightforward - loving people no matter what. Sometimes unconditional love is hard because it feels like it conflicts with your personal beliefs, but what is it worth being a Christian if you don't struggle a little? The Bible's promotion of unconditional love should motivate Christians to accompany the LGBTQ+ community and use our discipleship to overcome ignorance and discrimination. Even though there are passages in the Bible that say God judges homosexuals, it says GOD judges them. The

Bible gives out sort of job descriptions. God will love us, but he will also judge us. WE will love everyone. "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Galatians 5:14, NIV) God will do the judging, not us. So maybe in the future, the man walking down the street won't have to hide. He can walk proudly and be who he wants to be, love who he wants to love, and everyone will accept him, because what's a world without a little love?

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## Our Problem, Our Solution

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“He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty” (Luke 1:52-53, NRSV). Even before the birth of Christ, God has lifted up the marginalized with good things and sent the privileged away with nothing. For way too many years, this has been the opposite for our world. Not by the fault of God, but by the fault of the media and others claiming they know it all. For our world to have peace, we need to have an understanding that this problem exists and it does happen. The only way to do that is to understand why.

I believe the main reason we have this problem is because of something called “The Table”. “The Table” is a concept we discussed in class and practiced at the Augsburg College Youth Theology Institute and it helps illustrate how different groups have different perspectives on life. We had two people volunteer. One person sat on top of the table and the other person sat underneath. When we went to class we discussed how this is related to our world. We put the person below the table as a representation of the people in the “marginalized” category. They can only see a few things like the feet of others and the legs of the table. The person above the table was a representation of the people in the “privileged” category. They can see just about everything except what is going on underneath them. When we separated different types of people into the two categories, this is what we ended up with:

PRIVILEGED	MARGINALIZED
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- White</li><li>- Male</li><li>- Female</li><li>- Straight</li><li>- Teen</li><li>- Rich</li><li>- Powerful</li><li>- Educated</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Colored</li><li>- Female</li><li>- LGBT</li><li>- Teen</li><li>- Poor</li><li>- Homeless</li><li>- Marginalized</li></ul>

Some people are in both categories because we thought there are times where they are privileged and times when they are marginalized.

Now that we have our two categories and we know who is in what, I think we should know more about why there is separation. The people in the privileged section have all of the power and the people in the marginalized section have next to none. But power is confusing. According to the *Dictionary of Sociology* written by Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill and Bryan S. Turner, power is demonstrated by the probability that a command would be obeyed by a given group of people. Emphasize the word “probability.” The only way power becomes domination is if the command is obeyed by a group of people. And to make people obey you need to have power. So power turns to domination only if you have the power to make people obey.

Where is all this power coming from? Is it the media who raise up the powerful? Or is it the people who think they know everything that tell the marginalized they are wrong? Could they be the same person? For most cases, the media gives all the power, but sometimes it is the people who claim they know it all. Those people usually say that their faith says it so it’s true. In the book, *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World*, Douglas John Hall writes, “It is easy enough to claim belief in God. But the question that must always be put to all such claims is, simply, *Which God?* What is your image of this God in whom you claim belief?” (D.J. Hall, 76-77). So is this power really coming from their image of God? Or is it just coming from deep within their mind?

Hopefully it is now an understanding that there is an issue with the table and there should be a solution. The only other problem is that we need to find the solution. If we look to our hearts and do the little things like call someone out if they are being discriminative or step around the table and do the right thing I really think it would help make this world a better place.

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## Marginalized Meet Grace

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Throughout all of history, there have been people who are marginalized. These people are the outcasts, the hated, and the misunderstood. They have also been Jesus' best friends. These are people such as the woman who committed adultery, in John chapter eight, who is brought to the temple. Jesus tells her that he does not condemn her, and neither did the people in the temple, as they had all sinned too. Another outcast who was with Jesus and comforted his mother after the crucifixion was Mary Magdalene. She was hated by most of Jerusalem, but was also one of Jesus' closest followers, and truly someone whom he confided in. Jesus is preaching to sinners in Luke 15, and is asked why he chooses to dine with people of such disgusting ways. Jesus responds by telling of a shepherd who loses one sheep, and goes to find it (verses 1-7). Everyone is part of God's creation, and we, as humans, are called to accompany people who are marginalized, just as Jesus did thousands of years ago.

Martin Lee emphasizes the obligation the church has to change the way marginalized people are treated in his article *Association With the Marginalised*. This work tells that the practice of accompaniment should be the basis of faith, even more so the foundation of which churches are built upon (Lee, iii). This means that the sole purpose of life should be to make everyone's lives better. Every person has the opportunity to bring something to the table that can influence another human's life. Whether this is a joke, a hug, or a shared meal, all of these things have the power to change the course of someone's day, and with repeatedly showing the love of Jesus to neighbors, could have the power to change the course of someone's life.

However, Jesus did not simply help many of the people in these stories, he talked with them, shared meals with them, and genuinely cared about what was happening in their lives. Jesus was the master of accompaniment. Professor Jeremy Myers talked about accompaniment as the first step of public discipleship in a lecture in June of 2016 at the Augsburg College Youth Theology Institute. He said that accompaniment is how to know what others need from us, and in turn, learn what we need from other people (Myers, 2016). This practice lets people see that everything is not exactly as it appears to the one looking at it. The people experiencing situations often view it quite differently than those on the other side. The Brian Coyle center is a community center that houses everything from a food-shelf to afterschool and summer programming for school age kids. This center has seen the Cedar-Riverside community in Minneapolis change cultures and has adapted to each one. In the fall of 2016, they are hoping to start new programming to get parents more involved in their children's academics. They have practiced accompaniment and discernment to begin setting up this new programming.

The Brian Coyle center is currently helping a lot of marginalized groups of people. They are currently helping many refugees from Western Africa and many different parts of the world. This center is a current example of how Jesus would have wanted people with more privilege, in this case people who have been living in Minneapolis and who have safe places to be, to aid those who are not as privileged. After all, Jesus was a refugee (Lee 2). He was treated as an outcast, and was despised by the government, and most of the people of Egypt, where he and his family were. Jesus was no stranger to living in the margins. In fact, many of the parables he told featured an outsider, and they were often times the ones to do the right thing.

Perhaps the most well-known example of accompaniment with the marginalized in the Christian faith is that of the Good Samaritan. In this story, a man is left for dead on the side of the road, and a priest and a Levite, two of the most respected types of people, passed the man. These two men even went so far as to cross to the other side of the road, so as not to be associated with someone who was literally dying in the ditch. However, then the Samaritan, the gentile, the outcast, comes along. He gives the man his donkey to ride, and takes him to the nearest inn. The Samaritan pays for the man's meals and rooming, and makes sure the innkeeper takes good care of him (Luke 10:25-37). This story shows that anyone is able to accompany their neighbor, but what would have happened if one of the first two had taken care of the man? Perhaps these innocent bystanders could have brought him to the temple, and taken care of him themselves, or maybe to their homes, and given him a good meal to eat. Jesus never tells what does happened to the man, but maybe it was too late by the time the Samaritan reached him, and the man died. If the Priest would have stopped, then maybe the Levite would stop too, seeing that nobody is too good or important to lend a hand to those who need something at the moment. This parable is a perfect example of being called to accompany because even the outcasts are called to do it. Accompaniment is not something that is exclusive to a group of people, but something for everyone.

The Good Samaritan, the man on the side of the road, Mary Magdalene, and Jesus were outcasts. Not only were they marginalized, but they showed us how to accompany people just like themselves. God calls every human to follow in Jesus' footsteps and love and help unconditionally. As Joseph R. Veneroso states "God's love, forgiveness, and mercy are available to all" (Veneroso, 23). Not only are these things available to all, but they are also inside of all to be shared with other people. When reading the Bible, it is evident that Jesus was full of love and passion for his people. As neighbors on the Earth, everyone can also embody what Jesus stood for, and work to make this place better to live in.

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## An Amendment to Faith

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“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1 NRSV). Paul, while a beautifully eloquent writer and pillar of the church, leaves something to be wanted in his definition of faith. His definition lacks in the way that it doesn't tell us how we are to come to faith and to grow in faith; in a world in such a state of disaster this is the question most of us seem to have on our minds. How do we have conviction in a loving God as Christians, "For the Father himself loves you dearly"(John 17:27 NRSV), when we see humans tearing one another, and this very world apart? An answer comes simply from the fact that we all do not live in a vacuum. We live in a world full of pain and suffering, a world where we question ourselves and we question God, so much so that our God incarnate spread his arms on a cross and died for us, for the forgiveness of our sin. Thus it becomes clear that faith is not only an assurance of hope and is not simply a conviction in God despite lack of proof; Faith is wrought of suffering, and strengthened by doubt.

Suffering is one of the fundamentals of living that has seemingly always vexed Christian philosophers because that creates a contradiction in one of God's three fundamental characteristics as named in Saint Augustine's *Enchiridion*, namely that God is omniscient (171), omnipotent (110), and omnibenevolent(73). If God knows all then he knows all of our pain-further he even knows how he could mitigate and save us from our pain and yet God seemingly doesn't do anything about it despite being all good? This makes God out to be the world's most revered layabout. However since God is all knowing, all powerful, and all good, suffice it to say that he is greater than us, in fact the writer of Psalm 95 goes as far as to say that “The Lord is a great God and a great king above all gods.”(Psalm 95:3, NRSV). Further we know God has a plan as the apostle Paul states that “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what god has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9, NRSV). So then is it so inane to say that God may have a plan in our pain? If God is so much wiser than humans, it should be quite a logical sentiment that we cannot comprehend the plans of God. To illustrate, for those whom are well acquainted with dogs, you know that, while wonderful, they lack any intelligence compared to a person. If you happen upon a dog with a large splinter bursting forth from its paw then you know that to take out the splinter would cause the dog immense pain in that moment when it is torn out. Even the dullest dog would blame and perhaps even hate the person who took out the splinter for this moment of blinding pain. So too are we with God, at all times it would seem, in this world torn asunder with “splinters” of every variety. We blame God for our pain and further, some hold God personally accountable for a life rife with pain. You'll see that Moses puts it plainly in this contemporary reworking of Psalm 90:

“We live for seventy years or so  
(With luck we might make it to eighty)  
And what do we have to show for it? Trouble  
Toil and trouble and a marker in a graveyard”  
(Psalm 90:8-11, *The Message*)

Further Augustine's *Enchiridion* states that God is infinite (12), and what is a mere eighty years to that of infinity. For those who accept the doctrine of Christ, what then is a life full of pain if

we receive an eternity of safety and comfort? All we have while here in this mortal life is the ability to keep on, and some of us won't make it to eighty years but we must persist in living a righteous life in the warmth and light of Christ knowing that while we suffer greatly, we suffer because it is the will of God. God's will may seem cruel but I find solace in the Apostle Paul's words on the matter of suffering, "Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope." (Romans 5:3, NRSV). Thus is my faith affirmed by the existence of suffering, both how I can grow in faith and as a person through my own suffering and the comfort that I do not suffer alone and that it is a much older, and wiser will than my own.

Trial is seemingly one of few similarities between all Christians. As with any public stance in life there are those who believe Christianity to be incorrect as far as it goes, for opposing religious reasons or for scientific ones. Luckily we live in an era where comparatively, a rather slim amount of people die for their Christianity, at least in the first world. However, we as Christians face the ever growing and ever more vocal, rational empiricists. Anyone who has sat down for a holiday meal beginning with a prayer, undoubtedly, knows who I'm speaking about- that one cousin who refuses to say Amen, and scowls the entire meal about the fact that they had to even sit there with a group of people who are openly praying. Now this family member as a rational empiricist believes that one should not believe anything without having witnessed it. Often, at least in my family, this belief boils the blood of at least one person and the dinner table quickly turns into a debate forum about the rationality of God. As a religious person I am incredibly grateful for this, though I wish it would take place after dinner.

The book of James, chapter 20 helps to illustrate why I'm thankful for it. Commonly referred to as the story of doubting Thomas, the apostle John quotes Thomas as saying: "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe" (John 20: 24, NRSV). I am grateful because without Thomas to doubt, as a religious community how could come to terms with having any doubt? Further, without Thomas how could we ever see doubt as being anything but an embarrassment or malady? This story is read but once every three years as part of our liturgy. Now once every three years to remind us of our shortcomings in our faiths is far too infrequent but that is where rational empiricists step in.

The science of the last 100 years has contradicted the bible on many, many counts and they allow us to see that we need to see the bible metaphorically in some cases, as a book from a bygone era. However more than all of the evidence against biblical miracles, it is the lack of proof for God, as no one has ever taken a selfie with them, that rational empiricists rely on. I, however am still grateful for never having seen God because it teaches me to be more like that of Jacob, who became Israel by wrestling with God. The men and women of the movement of rational empiricism teach me to wrestle with God, by giving me the foundation upon which to analyze everything about God. These people along with the parable of doubting Thomas teach me that to truly come to faith I must take prudent steps in deciding what I believe. These people putting my own faith in God on trial remind me that I could be dead wrong, about God's existence, about Jesus dying for me, about everything. This strengthens my faith because it allows me to not go blindly into God's love but ask God, Why? Why am I affluent enough to sit at a computer and type this? Why were innocent children in Rwanda riddled with bullets instead of me? Why am I deserving of bountiful blessing in this first world while so many are not? Trial has strengthened my faith because it has allowed me to question God because, without questioning God at all for their actions I become complicit in a system that trivializes pain by



saying it gets better. A system that tells me that the reason people die is because God needed another angel. Trial has shown me that faith is not simply believing in God but wrestling with them so that I may know true faith in God's love.

On my first night under the instruction of Dr. Jeremy Myers during Augsburg College's Youth Theology Institute, I was asked what I would write my essay on. I, however was distracted and, it wasn't until I was nudged by another student that I realized it was I who was being asked the question. Thinking very quickly I said the first word that came to mind "Words" which got some modest laughs from my fellow students but it wasn't until Dr. Myers responded that I realized- I can write about words. He responded "You might be onto something there Will" (Myers). He showed me in that one simple sentiment what we need to write about; words. In fact now for me it is a moral imperative to write about words because the world is a mess, gone are the day in which people can go unrocked in their faith their whole lives through. To illustrate you need only turn on the evening news. So I have to write about words if I want my faith to survive, as people who identify themselves as having no religion went from making up "16% of Americans in 2007 to 23% in 2012" (Lipka). With so many people leaving their religion we need to redefine not just faith but Christianity entirely for a new generation because I refuse to let my religion die. I refuse to allow the church to dwindle because we're not innovating anymore. That is why I redefine faith as being, the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen, contrived of suffering, and shaped by contention.

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## Triumphalism

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To have faith is to believe without seeing. The technical definition is: strong belief in God based on *spiritual perception rather than proof* (Oxford Living Dictionary online). Therefore, it is hard to KNOW what you believe or 100% trust those beliefs. Douglas John Hall explains the theory of triumphalism in *The Cross in Our Context* as “the tendency... to present [views] as full and complete accounts of reality” (Hall, 17). *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* describes the term as “the tendency to think of the Church as irresistibly conquering throughout the centuries.” (Cerrito, 210) Another way to explain Triumphalism is: the attitude that one belief triumphs over all others. A triumphalist mind may stop itself from making new discoveries and deepening its relationship with God.

For Christians, the basis of our views come from the Bible. The Bible itself is composed of interpretations- of Jesus, of events, of words, etc. We then read those interpretations and create our own. Also, the Bible was written in a completely different time, and now everything has changed in the world. Sometimes the Bible actually contradicts itself: "The Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy." (James 5:11, NIV) "I will not pity, nor spare, nor have mercy, but destroy." (JER 13:14, NIV). When so many Christians are aware of the multiple views and evidence in the Bible, Triumphalism is still a major factor in the separation of the Christian church. Some Christians believe that being anything but heterosexual is a sin while others do not. Some Christians believe that sex before marriage is an instant ticket to Hell. Some Christians take these, and many other topics and make them black and white, with no room for discussion. Donald Borchert, a professor at Ohio University, concentrates most of his work around the question of how finite human beings can make definitive statements about the nature and ways of an infinite God. Humans know so little. We try ridiculously hard to figure everything out. It is very difficult to leave things unanswered, but we have no other choice. We can choose to believe certain things, but we will not know if they are true until we die. When someone is extremely “sure” of their own beliefs or views, it is almost like a dam in the river. It stops their personal faith from progressing or developing. What is the point of faith if it stops developing after everything is “figured out?” Faith is something that continues throughout a person’s whole life. It’s like math: after learning the basics like addition, one continues to turn addition into multiplication, and then algebra, and so on and so forth.

There are parts of faith that are intimate; between one and God. However, each time someone goes to church or a bible study they are surrounded by people who each experience faith in their own way. This is always a wonderful opportunity to ask questions, express your beliefs, and hear other views. I have come in contact with Christians who act as though what they believe is simply not up for debate. People tend to forget that our many questions about right and wrong cannot be answered, at least there is no way for humans to find the “correct” answer.

When I think about the way Faith works and the way God works, I do not believe that God could abandon us when things are unclear. The Ten Commandments are as clear as day, telling us what not to do as good Christians. They were given to Moses on stone tablets. On the other hand, verses about homosexuality in the bible are simply words and stories. Not necessarily said or done by the Lord (Him?)self. For me, sexuality raises a multitude of

questions (Most of which being “what ifs”.) With a topic this broad and unpredictable, how could ANYONE think they know all the answers? Some topics create violent debates between two people who both have to be right. To have a discussion with someone who will never change is not only pointless, but very exhausting. Disagreements and arguments most always sprout from two people who are both a little too sure of themselves. A misunderstanding is a common thing. Is it so hard to believe that one could misunderstand the Bible?

In the past several years, the amount of openly LGBTQ+ people has increased greatly. Just think for a minute- numerous Christians believe they are going to Hell. Ever since I read (some of) *Love Wins* by Rob Bell, I am not even sure if Hell exists! Of course, I am not going to be so bold as to say that Hell does not exist, I just wonder: how could the Lord send someone “down below” simply for following their heart and loving who they want to love? With a God whose entire platform surrounds FORGIVENESS, I simply cannot accept that even the most vicious person could suffer for all of eternity.

I am sure many people have trouble with unanswered questions. I take what I have learned since I was a child, singing along with actions to “Jesus Loves Me,” and leave the rest up to faith. When there are questions I know I cannot answer, I give them to God and let (Him?) take care of it.

The first night at ACYTI actually taught me a lot. I learned that we are surrounded by Triumphalism. We were asked what we have heard about God and who God is. The board ended up having few positive phrases on it and bunches of harsh views like “God Hates.” As a Christian, I refuse to praise a God who hates. Especially a God who hates people who love (Him?). Other than the few exceptional cases, no one can have a two-sided conversation with God. Because of this, we really cannot be sure of God’s opinions. All we have to go off of is the Bible, and I have already discussed the complexities of that.

Discussion is the most important part of Christianity, without which our faith would be stunted. When discussing one’s beliefs with another, ears should be willing to listen and open to new ideas. For me, few beliefs are set in stone. I will have a discussion with a family member, friend, or complete strangers, like at ACYTI and a single conversation could teach me something new. I do not believe faith is something that can be taught, however. Some things have to stay unanswered- for that is a way of testing your faith. Have faith in your God, for (He?) is the only one who can know all of the answers.

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## **God is Both Alive and Present in our Suffering**

Christine Siebels-Lindquist, Saint Paul, MN

I believe that God is powerful, and loves all creation beyond what I imagine to be possible. However, remaining 100% faithful in the midst of suffering is difficult, to say the least, regardless of whether that suffering is your own, or the agony of watching a loved one suffer or pass on. It is easy to feel like Gideon in the book of Judges. How do you have faith in God when terrible things are happening? This is illustrated within the quotation when Gideon asks God if Jehovah is still with them. He is confused because instead of the wondrous works he was told that Jehovah creates, he was only experiencing misfortune.

In Judges it says:

And Gideon said unto him, Oh, my lord, if Jehovah is with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where are all his wondrous works which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not Jehovah bring us up challenging from Egypt? But now Jehovah hath cast us off, and delivered us into the hand of Midian (Judges 6:13, NIV).

As depicted in the book of Judges, it is difficult to see God in the midst of suffering. In order for me to understand where God is throughout all the bad, I have to know that God is with us, suffering alongside us. Genesis shows that God doesn't cause this suffering, but he bears it with us, feeling the grief as keenly as we do.

In Genesis it says "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth...it grieved him at his heart" (Gen 6:5-6 NIV). The quote illustrates that God saw the wickedness of man, but chooses to step back, instead of directly intervening. The proposition that God showed us love by limiting his power to leave room for our free will, and is alive/present in our suffering on earth is a thought-provoking one. How can God witness this suffering, and not do something about it, when He is an all-powerful being? How can He allow innocent people to be tormented? How can He watch His beloved children placed with such heavy burdens of unhappiness that they sometimes choose to join Him in heaven? However, while the constraints the Lord places on his divine interactions can be difficult to understand in the midst of injustice, I know God is here grieving with us, through all the hardships that happen on earth.

God chose to practice restraint, and to limit his power so that we would have the freedom to act as individuals. Without constant interjection, and God micro-managing every detail of our lives, there is room for human freedom, as well as a large human capacity for mistakes. Deism, as opposed to monism, gives humans the ability to make decisions, both bad and good. God also retains the power to forgive our sins, washing us anew, and allowing us to start again.

God is a relational power, one who freely enters relationships, and entrusts us with power, to become what we are created to be. Being created in the "image of God", God gives us the freedom to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue, and have dominion (Genesis 1:28). God sharing his power with humans, in order to carry out their responsibilities, is a definite risk. However even in the midst of evil, sin, and selfishness, and their catastrophic effects, God continues to share those gifts of power. This honoring of the relationship between God and his people also carries risks. Risks such as being called neglectful, or seen as cruel by people who think that God should simply act in the stead of injustice, and fix the problem, instead of acting with constraint. Additionally, this relationship opens God up to the critique of violence, because

God often acts through people who use violence as a means of resolution, an example being the Babylonian armies. When God uses imperfect instruments such as people to carry out His will, the results will always have good and bad aspects, and the outcome will never be as clear as it would have if God had acted solely with His power.

Jesus, God's only son was human, just like we are, and he was not immune to these questions of faith. From the cross, Jesus' biblical laments could be heard, asking why he had been put in such a position. As said in Mark, "*And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?'*" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me)" (Mark 15:34 NIV)

This verse from the book of Mark shows us that wavering in your faith doesn't mean that your faith is weak, because even the son of God had questions as well. Many people do not want to link God with hardship, and suffering on earth. Martin Luther upset a lot of people by claiming that our God is a God of suffering, and that his divinity is compassion. These claims are in line with the Theology of the Cross, which states that God is with the oppressed and those who suffer unjustly, instead of with their oppressors.

There are many different kinds of suffering all around us. From natural disasters, and the randomness of tragic encounters with sickness, to consequential suffering to those who committed individual sins. Then there is the suffering caused not by chance, or by your own doing, but by the actions of those around you. An example being the Israelites, suffering because of the harsh policies of others, not by anything they did themselves. Another example is suffering because of communities with long histories of discrimination integrated into the structures of their lives, such as sexism and racism. The last type of suffering is that of vocation. This suffering could be avoided, but the people who bear it have been called upon by God, and have explicitly taken it up for the sake of their neighbor.

God is present in each of these types of suffering, and is with us, during each specific case. Sin and evil exist in our world today, and always have, with the power to inflict and/or intensify suffering. However, as shown above in the many types of suffering mentioned, suffering does not mean sin. God created a world where risks, challenges, and suffering is part of life totally apart from sin. Things happen, and the world is nowhere near a perfect or fair place. Some people are placed with heavier burdens, or challenges throughout their life, and there's no explanation for it.

The idea that God originally took, and continues to take, a step back, refraining from fixing all the injustices and suffering in the world is difficult to understand. This means that he chose between allowing sin a presence here on earth and withholding power from humans to make decisions, and be who they are. God choose to give us individual freedom, and the ability to control our actions, through grievances of his own. But what continually comforts me, is that God takes all of our suffering, and bears it with us, lightening our own load of grief. God grabs ahold of our pain, and wears it in the form of a cross.

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## Thieves

Mickaela Pasch, Rochester, MN

When looking at any part of scripture, the viewing lens of a person changes depending on their environment. Each person will interpret events and perceive places in a different way, because they each have experienced different events in their life. So while looking at the scripture *John 10:10*, “The thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. I come that they may have life, and have it abundantly”, one might think that this means that mankind is a thief, taking the world and destroying its natural beauty. Whereas another person might think that it says the nature is encroaching on mankind’s hard work. With the theology of the cross, mentioned in Douglas John Hall’s book *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World*, we know that the difference in interpretation is both natural and acceptable.

In dealing with the topic of interpretation, the best way to tackle it was to go ahead and collect data to prove its validity. A diverse group of people was invited to participate in an experiment, which entailed answering questions given a certain location. The inspiration for this experiment was from Augsburg’s Youth Theology Institute, where this activity was also done. The group of twelve individuals was of varying ages, genders, and came from different denominations. The group went to three locations in Rochester, Minnesota where they were asked a series of questions, read a specific text, and then following the reading were asked different questions. The locations were chosen to be as diverse as possible: The quaint front lawn of Mount Olive Lutheran Church, a peaceful place in Quarry Hill Nature Center, and a dusty Arby’s parking lot near Highway 52. These locations were chosen so that the answers would vary from place to place, and also to see how the reading of the text changed the answers. This was also compounded by the fact that this was a diverse group of people; therefore, they have had different experiences in their lives, as well as varying beliefs and morals. Once at each location, the group was asked questions such as, “Do you consider this place to be beautiful?”, and, “Describe your surroundings.” The text *John 10:10* was read which says, “The thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” After that passage was read a few times, the group was asked more questions: “*What is the thief in this environment?*”, “*What is the abundant life?*”, and “*How has the text altered your thoughts about this place?*”

The responses that were received from this group were extremely intriguing. Yes, there were a few similarities, but there were some views that were completely different from the person that had sat right next to them. One of the most interesting differences was at Location 1, Mount Olive Lutheran Church. Many of the people surveyed had ties to that church, thus they considered this place to be beautiful. Most of them subconsciously thought this, because they had memories tied to that particular place. The people that did not have ties to the church considered the front lawn of Mount Olive somewhat beautiful. They enjoyed it because there was grass and flowers, but didn’t enjoy the fact that it was loud due to traffic. Another striking difference was found in the Arby’s parking lot. The younger pool of participants focused more on the cosmetics of the place, describing it as “not beautiful”, because “it was dirty, loud and there were smokers out” as said by one person. Many of the participants had also witnessed a quarrel break out between a pair of people in the parking lot, creating a very hostile environment. However, the

older pool saw an abundance of life in this place due to the possibility of employment and it being a source of food.

Any one of these ideas conceived by the participants could be traced back to that person's past. Every single one of them could be placed in a group that holds similar beliefs. However, each person would end up bouncing between multiple groups, due to their varying opinions at each place. Yet, placing these people in categories is unnecessary, because the experiment already proved the difference of opinions in each place. The locations and questions were the exact same to each participant; the only difference were the minds and experiences of each individual. They have experienced different things in their lives, so they each hold varying beliefs and values. This small-sided experiment can be applied world-wide, showing that each different location, class, and person will interpret things in a different way. This is much like the interpretation of the Bible. No one way is more correct than the other, the way that someone interprets the Bible will most likely change with the environment and time. This is why there are so many different denominations of Christianity, even though they are all based off of the very same book. For example, Martin Luther disagreed with the beliefs that the Roman Catholic Church held, because he interpreted the Bible in a different way than the heads of the church. Martin Luther was the catalyst of the Reformation, because he believed in hermeneutical reflection, which is the critical theory of interpretation (Freeman, 295). This way of thinking is rooted in the New Testament, when Luke's gospel shows Jesus asking, "Do you understand what you are reading?" (1 Corinthians 12:10 and 14:26-8). In other words, Jesus is interpreting the Word of God.

Douglas John Hall discusses *theologia crucis*, also known as the theology of the cross, in *The Cross in Our Context*. The theology of the cross acknowledges that there are gaps in knowledge with faith, and that people have to modify their beliefs to find a modern understanding of the Bible. He also talks about the *theologia gloriae*, the theology of glory, which has a sense of superiority in their beliefs. So, instead of acknowledging the gaps in knowledge and the differences in interpretation, people simply deny all other opinions and "glorify" their own (Hall, 212). Simply denying others interpretations does not address the fact that there are many different ways to interpret certain events.

As seen with the differences in ages, and churches, people develop different beliefs based on the types of environments they grow up in. These people have taken the Bible and come to understand it in a way that can be applied in modern day. Each person's faith holds a different place in their heart, creating different ideas. Most people will believe that their idea is right; however, we as Christians have to work to understand other backstories, so that we may fully understand why that person believes what they do. Learning other people's backstories will ultimately create fewer misunderstandings and help to create a more understanding and welcoming environment.

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## **Compromising with Theology of Christ**

Theo Tollefson, Burnsville, MN

The history of this world has many diverse aspects to it, many of which have been formed from one common human characteristic; faith. The characteristic is inbred into every single human who has existed; one of the few things we all have in common. Through many dark and bright hours have these religions ruled and suffered under territories of the world, bringing both good and evil to where they have been. With both good and evil being spread from a great number of faiths and religions; people throughout history have shaped their views on faiths and religions based off the history and modern movements they know of these organizations. At Augsburg College Youth Theology Institute, we, the participants, were sponges absorbing knowledge surrounding the history and modern activities of religion and faith, but mainly Christianity. But what history and modern activities you ask? Like that of a group of Christians building a modern version of Noah's ark in Kentucky that has the disapproval of the famous Bill Nye the Science Guy (Ortiz)? No, those activities surrounding social justice and how the Theology of Christ plays into the past, present, and future of it all. A large portion of discussion focused on two ways to express the Theology of Christ; the Theology of the Cross, and the Theology of Glory. The Theology of the Cross and the Theology of Glory both stand for two common human characteristics; selflessness and selfishness. Thus, not only can their lessons and themes be represented in Christians, but people of all religions, faiths, and those who are non-religious or faithful as well.

The Theology of the Cross and Theology of Glory were both traced back to the time of Martin Luther. What Luther provides here is just a simple definition of two philosophies that Christian Theologians have had great debate about for hundreds of years. To be specific, they both are mentioned and intertwined in number twenty one of Luther's Ninety-Five Theses. "A theology of glory (theologia gloria) calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross (theologia crucis) calls the thing what it actually is." Two simple ideals of belief that have orchestrated great argument and controversy among the Christian community (primarily the Lutherans though); isn't it incredible? Right now, we will focus on the Theology of Glory and what it means by definition and interpretation. The Theology of Glory is a way of using the word and teachings of Christ, and only using them for a person's self-benefit. Those people who embrace the Theology of Glory are often found to be full of Triumphalism. "Triumphalism refers to the tendency in all strongly held world views, whether religious or secular, to present themselves as full and complete accounts of reality, leaving little if any room for debate or difference of opinion and expecting of their adherents unflinching belief and loyalty"(Hall, 17). Here theologian Douglas John Hall describes triumphalism simply as selfishness. There are a lot of other words that suit the definition such as ignorant, stupidity, and cupidity. Yet selfishness seems to be the most suiting word to describe Theology of Glory.

In class, it was discussed with Professor Jeremy Myers that Theology of Glory is a matter of triumphalism and people ignoring the facts of reality; only basing facts off their own opinion and the reality they accept whether through the bible or other source material. There seems to be many people, beyond Christians who embrace Theology of Glory. One great example among our modern society is Republican Politicians in America. At the 2016 Republican Convention in Cleveland, there were a great number of Republicans who embraced the theology of glory,

whether they had Christian beliefs or not. One good example from the convention is from a CNN interview of Newt Gingrich. In the interview, the anchor had been giving the Republican information about crime rates going down across the nation from statistics done by the FBI. Even with these stats being presented to Gingrich, he still denied them to be true because he had cherry picked certain cities in America where crime rate is higher than other locations. He also claimed “The average American I will bet you this morning, does not think crime is down, and does not think they are safer”(Last Week Tonight with John Oliver). After this, the anchor still kept telling him the truth of crime rates being down over the past 8 years, but even with this reality, Gingrich kept denying. Saying to the stats, “No, that’s your view. What I said is also a fact. The current view is that the liberals have a whole set of statistics which “theoretically” “may” be “right”, but it’s not where human beings are”(Last Week Tonight with John Oliver). Even after saying this, the anchor had to keep reminding him these are factual stats not done by liberals. They had been done by the FBI! Gingrich being a theologian of glory kept saying his word was equally true. That though, is completely false. These are things that a theologian of glory would do, ignoring the actual facts of reality, and shaping other people’s view based off of their own. Theology of glory can perfectly blend in with the title of fear and loathing. It is through fear and loathing in which most of this world suffers, and what theologians of glory embrace to take control over someone or something. People like Gingrich, or Trump or even those on Fox News, take the fear and the loathing aspects of a story, so that they can spread fear into the minds of their listeners and in hope, they will embrace the same loathing that these “leaders” had to begin with. These are the things that theologians of glory do. They take fear, loathing, ignorance, stupidity, cupidity, and worst of all, their selfish intentions, spread them into the minds of other people, and create great hatred throughout the land we all know as America.

Yet, with all the darkness that seems to come from that of a Theologian of glory, the Theology of the Cross brings out an aspect of light and hope to overcome that of glory. The Theology of the cross is composed of the opposite things that create the Theology of glory- Knowledge, wisdom, peace, serenity, harmony, and selflessness. These are things that can be found within every single human being, but it’s more of a matter of those who embrace it, rather than those who have it. Theology of the Cross is defined as calling something as it actually is. This is what the CNN news anchor had been doing with Newt Gingrich as I mentioned earlier when he kept denying the reality that wasn’t his own.

One particular individual that embraces Theology of the Cross, who no longer resonates his faith with Christianity, is Chris Stedman. Chris Stedman was raised without any religious affiliation, but by the time he started middle school, a group of popular kids had convinced him to check out their Christian youth group. After attending the youth group a couple times, Stedman was finally finding his faith in Christianity. As time went on, and as he attended more youth groups, Stedman indulged himself with his faith. He started to read the bible on a daily basis, but found some discomfort as his reading progressed. At the time, Stedman had been secretive about his sexuality and believed he could find some answers in the bible. Stedman said in his memoir *Faithieist* that; “I asked my Grandma Kay to buy me a *Teen Study Bible*, which I read fervently. I was asking a lot of questions, and in the process, I discovered two things almost simultaneously: I was queer, and my church would kick me out if they discovered my secret” (Stedman, 39-40). Stedman wanted to be a devoted Christian, but from what the bible and other scriptures had told him, he thought the LGBT community was rejected in the eyes of Jesus and God. This internal conflict went on for a few years for Stedman, until his mother found out about his secret by accident. Stedman was fearful of anyone finding out about his secret, assuming the

worst would occur if someone did find out including his mother. When she confronted him about the issue, she told him it had no sway on how she felt about him, giving him her unconditional love in that very moment. The day after they discussed Stedman's secret, she had him meet with a minister. Stedman felt very uncomfortable at first, but it was quite ironic for him when the minister told him he understood his conflict and that "Jesus would be flipping tables in the authors' offices over this" (Stedman, 58). It finally gave Stedman the voice he needed to hear to help him be the person he wanted to be. As his teen years went on, Stedman felt less connected with Jesus, but still was able to teach other kids who were unsure of being LGBT's and also use it in the context of the theology of the Cross. Even after Stedman had let go of his faith in Christ, he still continued to use the theology of the cross to help others around him. He had worked for a great many religious groups and organizations in Chicago to help others who conflicted with their beliefs or had their beliefs conflicting with society, and there they would set aside differences and come together to create improvements for our society. This is what Theologians of the Cross do. They use their beliefs and the teachings of Christ to help others no matter who they are or what they believe. Those who embrace the theology of the Cross do so with selfless intention in mind.

So after providing these explanations of the two theologies, you could be asking how they can still be applied to different religions or those who are non-religious. Here is one last example to prove my point; Star Wars. Yes Star Wars is being brought into the talk of real life religion, but that's because there is a good comparison from a galaxy far far away to use with these two theologies. The Jedi and the Sith are the two dominating religions in their galaxy; the Jedi use the force for the light side and good intention, the Sith use the force for the dark side and evil intention. George Lucas himself said that the Jedi use the force for selfless intention and the Sith use the force for selfish intention. So does this sound familiar? Haven't I been spending most of this paper discussing how the theology of glory is made up of selfish intention and the theology of the cross made up of selfless intention? Yes, I have been. Now did Lucas draw the influence of the Jedi and Sith from these two theologies? No, he drew most of the influence of the Force and it's religion from Japanese mythology, but that's a different paper. Anyway, this is evidence that even if the influence isn't drawn from one religion to another, the fact is still there that different religions have theologies that are similar to one another.

The slogan of the week at ACYTI had been "Jesus has left the building." The meaning behind this had stood for us students to embrace the Theology of the Cross, and taking our selfless acts into our church community. Now as my thesis stated; the theology of the cross and the theology of glory both stand for two common human elements; selflessness and selfishness. Thus, not only can their lessons and themes be represented in Christians, but people of all faiths, religions, and those who are non-religious as well. So, as others who attended ACYTI 2016 are now embracing theology of the cross to help their Church and its surrounding community, I, on the other hand, I'm looking at a bigger picture. I am keeping my eyes open for anyone or anything that is need of a voice and selfless duty. Not to say that what they are doing is wrong, but only to say I am taking a different approach. I do hope that everyone would embrace selflessness within themselves, but I know realistically, that will not happen. Even though there is so much light and hope that is out there, when men like a guy named Donald Trump are allowed to have as much power as he does now and could possibly be receiving more. We really need to be setting aside differences so we don't allow a narcissistic, psychopathic, racist slum to take control of a nation. Mainly because not everyone reading this is a Christian or an atheist like myself. There are likely Muslims, Hindus, Jews, and Buddhist reading this paper as well. I can

certainly admit that I have no knowledge of theologies similar to that of the Cross in these religions. If there are that do exist, that's spectacular and I'd hope to learn about them in the future. Yet for now, I should end with this. Our world is in a darker time than we believe it to be right now for many reasons beyond a man named Trump. Theologies, beliefs, and ideals that come together through the embodiment of selflessness are what can help all of us take down these social injustices, and put forth stepping stones for our society. "For the times, they are a'changin'."

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## **Two Ends of the Stick**

Heidi Jenkins, Rochester, MN

For many years Christians and Muslims have not seen eye to eye. We stand together, and we stand apart. Everyone has their own beliefs about faith and how it exists in their life. After 9-11 Americans have made numerous stereotypes of Muslims as a group. But in every religion, there are two sides of the spectrum, the radical and the conservative. They may have numerous beliefs in common, but act upon them differently. If Muslim and Christian communities partake in interfaith dialogue focusing on religious beliefs and cultural practices they will have a greater understanding and acceptance of each other.

Interfaith dialogue is very important for creating a peaceful world. In order to coexist with people who have different beliefs and views on the world, one needs to understand and accept another's beliefs. Interfaith dialogue movement started in the 1950's. In 1964, Pope Paul VI established a Secretariat for Non-Christian religions and in 1989, John Paul II renamed it to Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. The goal of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue is to help Non-Christian Religions to study religious traditions, provide resources, and promote interreligious dialogue through education and by facilitating local efforts by Catholics. There have been many programs formed over the past fifty years like the World Council of Churches' program for Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies (DFI) in 1974. At DFI, Muslim-Christian relations were a goal from the start.

Christianity and Islam are the two largest religions in the world today. So, if in our world 54% of people can't get along because of religious views, how are we supposed to have world peace? The bible states: "Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by doing some people have entertained angels without knowing" (Hebrews 13: 1-2, NIV). Jesus died for everyone's sins, not once does it say only for the believers. "O mankind! Lo! We have created you from male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware." (The Qur'an, Al-Hujraat 49.13). In the quran it also states that all may know one another, so why do we look at stereotypes about religions? We all need to get to know each other like we are blind, so we only see what's on the inside, because that's all that really matters. So take the words of the Lord, take the words of Allah, learn about each other, and then explore your faith through and with each other.

In numerous ways Islam and Christianity are similar. We, as Christians, are supposed to live our lives by the Ten Commandments, you could call them guidelines to help you reach Heaven; but, God will never judge us by our mistakes and forgives all sins. Those who are Muslims, base their everyday faith on The Five Pillars of Islam, the Islamic guidelines to reach paradise and not hell. Allah, like God, is a forgiver of all sins. Muslims learn from teachings in their holy book, The Qur'an, which contains the words and learning from the prophet Muhammad. Christians learn from the teachings in the Bible, the Christian holy book. The Bible is the stories and teachings of Jesus and his twelve disciples. Most of the Bible is about Jesus and the life he lived. In The Qur'an, Jesus is seen as Christ or Messiah, the same way titles he is given by Christians. As you can see, Christians and Muslims have many similarities beyond what I have shown you.

There are numerous things going on in Minnesota to help support interfaith dialogue. The Minnesota Council of Churches and Islamic Center of Minnesota co-sponsor a monthly meeting (September-May) on the 3rd Sunday. During the 2-hour sessions different aspects of faith are presented and people take the time to learn about each other and respect one another. St. Thomas College offers numerous programs like Interfaith Discussion Groups and overnight retreats at both their St. Paul and Minneapolis campuses. During these times together, they share, learn, and grow a mutual respect for each other. Augsburg College offers an Interfaith Scholars Program. The group of students that participate, take interreligious dialogue and put it into action.

Over the years relations between Christians and Muslims have been getting better and then slightly worse, but overall I believe it's because of the stereotypes we put on each other. I think our youth need to start engaging in the change that needs to be happening. We need to stand up against, and remove these stereotypes. Interfaith Dialogue is very important in making a peaceful world because religion is a huge part of our world culture.

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## Theology and Public Leadership Major

Theology and Public Leadership is an interdisciplinary major that forms leaders for work at the intersections of church and society. Students are equipped with the necessary theological and theoretical frameworks, leadership skills and servant hearts to lead a variety of communities in their expression of faith and their work for justice in the world. This happens through the disciplined study of theology, scripture, the social sciences and ministry. A distinctive element of the major is the combination of practical and theological training: students will have many opportunities to apply their knowledge and discernment skills in specific ministry contexts, including a supervised internship.

Graduates work in the areas of youth & family ministry, congregational ministry, community organizing, public policy & advocacy, non-profits and graduate school. Our vision is a generation of Christian leaders equipped to lead the Christian church into the public square for the common good.

Students earn a Bachelor of Arts in Theology and Public Leadership and are encouraged to combine this degree with one of the concentrations on the back, a minor or a second major in an area of interest.

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## Required Courses

Theology Core	Ministry Core
Research Methods in Religion	Theological Foundations for Public Ministry
The Bible in Culture and Counterculture	Life and Work of the Church
Martin Luther and the Reformation	The Art of Public Ministry
Contemporary Theology	Internship
Religion Keystone	

## Cross-Disciplinary Elective OR Concentration

*Complete one course in a concentration listed below or complete the entire concentration*

- **Youth Studies Concentration**—offers students the opportunity to explore the history and practice of work with children and youth, to form a critical and constructive framework for understanding and appreciating young people, and to develop the necessary skill set for effective work with children and youth.
- **Leadership and Management Concentration**—prepares students to manage and lead organizations, especially non-profits.
- **Community Engagement Concentration**—prepares students to be community organizers and leaders who help organizations connect with their communities.
- **Worship and Music Concentration**—prepares students to be worship and music leaders in congregations and other faith communities.
- **Environmental Stewardship Concentration**—prepares students to organize, educate and lead faith communities and other non-profits around environmental stewardship.
- **Advocacy & Public Policy Concentration**—prepares students to lead faith communities and other non-profits in their work around advocacy and public policy.
- **Human Services Concentration**—prepares students to work in faith communities and other non-profits serving individuals and families in need.
- **Cross-Cultural Relations Concentration**—prepares students to help faith communities and other non-profits work effectively across cultural differences.



### Contact Information

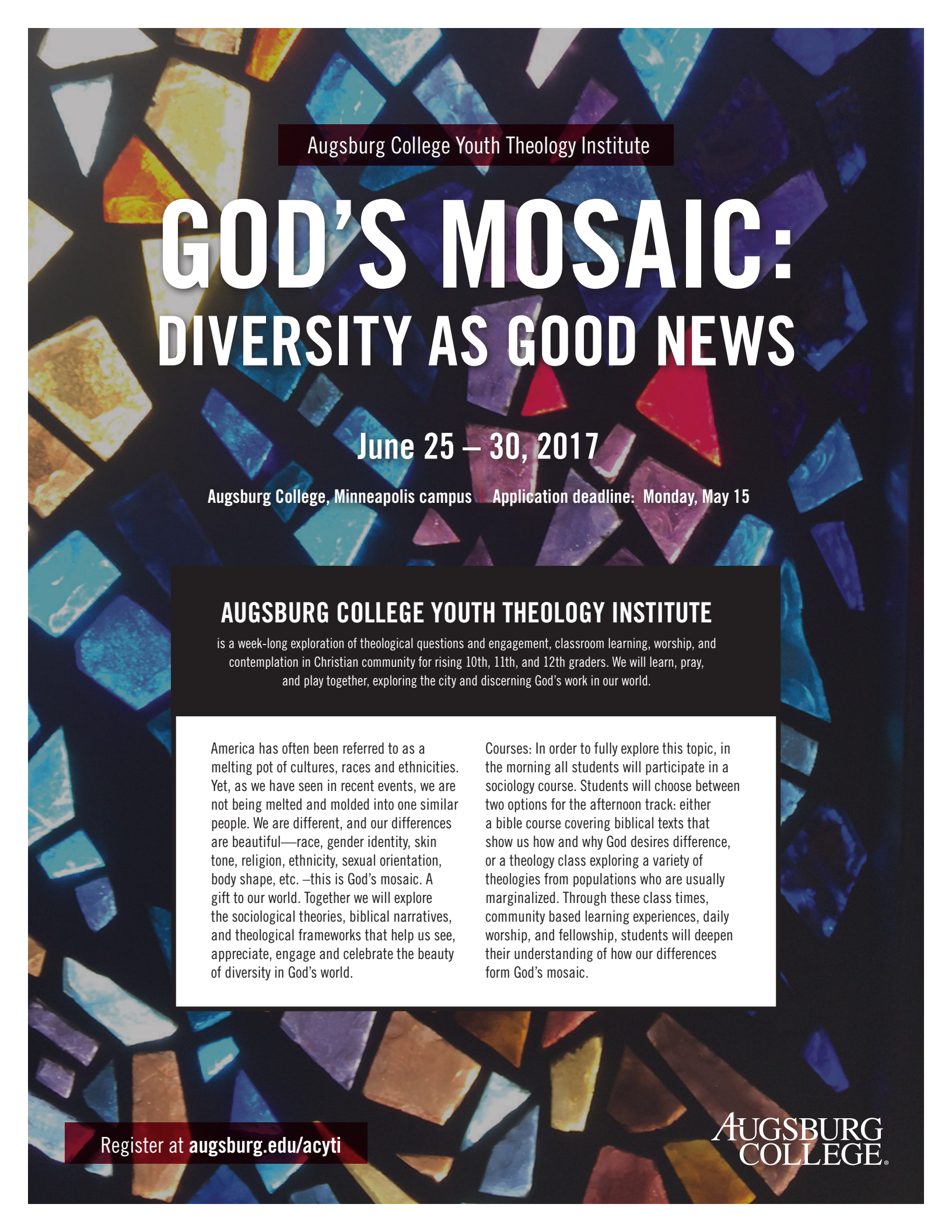
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The background of the entire poster is a vibrant mosaic of irregular, colorful tiles in shades of blue, purple, yellow, and red, set against a dark background. The tiles are of various shapes and sizes, creating a textured, geometric pattern.

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