

## Called Together and Called Out

John 11: 1-3, 17-27, 38-44

[Augsburg University Chapel, 16 April 2019]

I want to lift up what it means to be called together as community and called out to be God's people in the world – perhaps the foundational vocation for this university where we say “We believe we are called to serve our neighbor.”

It seems especially fitting that this theme falls in this Holy Week. For our ancestors, the call to community is grounded firmly in the narrative that unfolds in Jesus's journey on earth. The Word made flesh – Augsburg's founding scripture from John 1:14 - God breaks into human history in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, whose path in the world preaching and healing and offering a glimpse of God's intentions for God's people culminates in Jerusalem – first in a triumphant entry illustrating what humans expect of their leaders; then in the days that follow during which Jesus is betrayed, denied and charged with crimes against the religious and political leaders of his time; sent to his horrific death on the cross as God's ultimate sacrifice for the world God loves so much; and finally raised from the dead, vindicating and redeeming the world so that God's faithful people might know peace, love and hope beyond human understanding. It is a breathtaking arc of divine story-telling. It is the why for how we are called together.

The poet T.S. Eliot captures this call to be together in these simple yet profound words:

*What life have you if you have not life together?  
There is no life that is not in community,  
And no community not lived in praise of GOD.*

(T.S. Eliot, *Choruses from The Rock*)

Throughout Augsburg's 150-year history, we have been marked by the faithful call to community. From the early days in Marshall, Wisconsin, where quite literally two or three intrepid pioneers gathered together in God's name formed a community of teaching and learning. To the journey to the then tiny village known as Minneapolis, where the good and faithful people of Trinity Lutheran Congregation joined in supporting a fledgling seminary. To the formation of the Lutheran Free Church in 1893 – a firm response to conflicting agendas that threatened the Augsburg community and that led to a lively 70-year history of a church and its college and seminary carving out a vision of what German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer called “life together.” And in more recent years, a college and now a university marked by a deep sense of mission and partnership that shapes both our work here on campus and our work in the world, wherever we are found. We are called together, to live in praise of God for the community that gives us life.

In this understanding of our vocation – called together – we also must name the work we are called to do as a community, to take responsibility for how our story continues to unfold, even when we might rather look inward to the safety and comfort of the community we are called to be.

In this way, as we are called into community, we also are called out to be God's hands and feet in the world. Our gospel for this morning recounts the familiar story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead.

Jesus arrives too late to heal Lazarus from his illness and finds Lazarus already in the tomb. The scene that unfolds portends Jesus's own resurrection story as Jesus asks that the stone be moved. He then calls to Lazarus – "Come out!" and demands that Lazarus be unbound from his burial cloths.

Like Lazarus, we too are called out. That may be wrenching, disorienting, frightening – but like Lazarus, we also have been unbound, freed to live as those who have been saved, those resurrected. And the unbinding of Lazarus by those gathered at the tomb reminds us that we also can count on the continuing "unbinding" that comes from a community, this community, of those gathered to witness the resurrection...God does not leave us alone in our vocational journeys as those called out.

At our most faithful over the past 150 years, Augsburg has followed the call to be together even as we are called out into the world for the sake of our neighbor. In our own time, our work on campus to meet the needs of our community members with programs like StepUp and CLASS and Campus Cupboard. Our work in the neighborhood to walk alongside our immigrant neighbors as they seek healthier and more just lives. Our work around the world in communities where indigenous people remind us of how they have been oppressed by those who have invaded their lands. Our work to heal the earth and be a beacon for environmental justice. This is what it means to live and work together as those called out.

Wendell Berry, in his whimsical poem, "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front", offers us an insightful juxtaposition of the life of the world vs. the life called out, and herein points to the path forward :

So, friends, every day do something  
that won't compute. Love the Lord.  
Love the world. Work for nothing.  
Take all that you have and be poor.  
Love someone who does not deserve it.  
Denounce the government and embrace  
the flag. Hope to live in that free  
republic for which it stands.  
[Give your approval to all you cannot  
understand. Praise ignorance, for what man  
has not encountered he has not destroyed.

Go with your love to the fields.  
Lie down in the shade. Rest your head  
in her lap. Swear allegiance  
to what is nighest your thoughts.  
As soon as the generals and the politicians  
can predict the motions of your mind,  
lose it. Leave it as a sign  
to mark the false trail, the way  
you didn't go. Be like the fox  
who makes more tracks than necessary,  
some in the wrong direction.  
Practice resurrection.

Practice resurrection. Here is where called together and called out intersect. The resurrection, the reason we come together, is also the reason we are called out to be God's people in the world. This is what it means to live as those who have been called out – it is not easy, it is counter-cultural, it flies in the face of the world's power and authority, but it is the call we have received as God's people and God surrounds us with the Holy Spirit and the community of the faithful who join us in living as those who have witnessed the resurrection!

In this Holy Week, we proclaim that God's reign has begun, that we have been called together and that we have been called out! Practice resurrection! Thanks be to God for 150 years of being called together and called out – thanks be to God for you, for Augsburg University, and for the life of discipleship to Jesus the risen Christ. Amen.