

## NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Volume Seventeen, Number Two (December 2015)

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

(W. Wordsworth, from "The Prelude")

## NOTES FROM READERS

>>What you think<<

Merry Christmas and Happy 2016, faithful readers. I wish you blessings in the new year.

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

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## REFLECT ON THIS

>>Gathering grain<<

I was honored to be named the Minnesota Professional Fundraiser of the year by the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) – we had a great year of fundraising at Augsburg! I was reminded that I had received a similar honor back in 1994 from the Chicago chapter of what is now AFP. That was the occasion when I first shared my “Grain gatherer” vocational story, a story that has resonated for me and many others as a meaningful way to think of and practice our noble work. I decided to craft my acceptance remarks around the story – once again...

“I am deeply humbled and grateful for this special honor – and privileged to receive it alongside these remarkable individuals and organizations that make our community such a humane and compassionate and progressive place to live, work and serve.

Twenty-one years ago this month, I received this same award from the Chicago chapter of AFP (then NSFRE) and in my remarks I shared the following story that has become iconic, not just for me, but for a generation of philanthropic fundraisers who have found in it inspiration to embrace the joy and nobility of our work alongside all of you. Here is my story..

I remember a Saturday morning some 45 years ago, when my father, a Lutheran minister, and I hopped into a borrowed pick-up truck to commence a day of work on behalf of the Church World Service’s CROP program. Though most of you probably know CROP today through its annual “walks,” in rural areas CROP has long sponsored the grain contribution effort we helped with that day.

For eight or nine hours that Saturday, my dad and I drove from farm to farm in our southern Wisconsin community gathering contributions of grain from generous farmers. When our pick-up truck was full, we would drive to the local grain elevator to unload. At the end of the day, the

elevator operator totaled our various contributions and the contributed grain was transported to the Church World Service barge or flatbed, ultimately ending up in Africa or Asia as part of U.S. efforts to alleviate world hunger.

On that Saturday, my dad and I were grain-gatherers. Along with the grain donors (the farmers), the grain-storers and counters (the elevator operator), the grain brokers (Church World Service), and the grain recipients (the hungry of the world), we participated in the common work of a community where each member did his/her part, helping to relieve a need, building a healthier world.

It is a simple picture of a complex set of dynamics. It is, however, a picture that defines who I am and what it is I care about in my work. I was called to be a grain-gatherer. I live out that vocation every day in my professional life. From my early experience, however, I know well that my work makes no sense outside of the community of grain donors, counters, brokers, and recipients, who share my commitment to a more humane, just and responsible world.

This is what I call philanthropy as common work – each of us doing our part in concert to advance the values and missions of our organizations and causes. In the spirit of common work, then, allow me to thank...

- First, our farmers – donors all and particularly the remarkable alumni and friends of Augsburg College whose generosity and vision for our students, faculty and mission will transform our community and campus for years to come;
- Second, my fellow grain gatherers – volunteer and paid – and especially my friend and hero, Mike Good, who inspired all of us with his leadership and belief in Augsburg, and our vice president, Heather Riddle, who never doubted and gave us all hope for our highest philanthropic aspirations;
- And the faculty, staff and students at Augsburg, who remind us each and every day that our mission – to educate students to be informed citizens, thoughtful stewards, critical thinkers and responsible leaders – is what we are called to serve;
- And finally to my family – Abigail, Thomas and Maya – certainly for their patience and understanding of a crazy schedule, but more so for their love and shared pride in all things Augsburg!

Thank you all again. It is a privilege to be your partner in the common work of philanthropy.

>>A weary world<<

## **A Weary World**

Romans 8:22-24 (NRSV)

*22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; 23 and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen?*

John 1:14 (NRSV)

*14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*

[Augsburg College Chapel, Advent 1, November 30, 2015]

Grace and peace to you from God our creator and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – and blessings to you in this Advent season when love once again breaks into human history to enliven and empower us to live as God's faithful people in the world! Amen.

As we enter this Advent season and prepare for our annual Advent Vespers worship services this week, the haunting hymn we have just sung and the theme of this year's vespers – "Light dawns on a weary world" – rings especially true. For surely we all long for the light to break forth in the midst of our darkness, to offer us respite and peace and hope in the midst of a weary world marked by violence and fear and hate. How long, O God, must we wait; how long must we live in the darkness; how long must we despair of your reign breaking in?

How long, indeed?

We grieve over a weary world, a world that groans in labor pains – pains that each of us feels deeply and personally. A weary world where terrorists kill innocent people in Paris and Beirut and Mali and Nigeria; where insurgents on all sides garner fear and hatred; where our sacred earth is threatened by our own selfish and foolish behaviors; where communities around our country are torn apart by violence that disproportionately targets people of color; where, even in our own campus community, our fellow travelers experience bias and misunderstanding. How long must we wait for love and justice and mercy and compassion and hope to break into our groaning creation, our weary world?

Surely our gracious God hears our prayers. And yet, one of the temptations of Advent is our often impatient, even passive, waiting for the light to dawn. We grieve and we lament – surely important acts in themselves – and we wait for the light we know has come and will come again, but is that where it ends, is that all there is to do?

As we turn into this liturgical season, let us be reminded of this college's founding scripture and perhaps the most apt way to sum up what Advent marks for God's faithful people: "And the Word became flesh, and dwelled among us." Consider this. God broke into human history. God came into the darkness. God chose to dwell in the weary world, alongside of us, and in so doing offers us all a path forward, an inspiration to move beyond waiting, the stuff of which hope is forged. And that is what we embrace this Advent.

When we are tempted to sit back and wait, we give up on the mystery and work that is all around us - a mystery we are called to embrace, work we are called to do. In one of this year's Advent Vespers

readings, the poet Wendell Berry invites us to know the dark, for God is in the dark as well, blooming and singing of the promised redemption.

*To go in the dark with a light is to know the light.*

*To know the dark, go dark. Go without sight,*

*and find that the dark, too, blooms and sings,*

*and is traveled by dark feet and dark wings.*

–Wendell Berry, “To Know the Dark” from *The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry*, 1999.

As theologian Barbara Brown Taylor has written: "...here is the testimony of faith: darkness is not dark to God; the night is as bright as the day." So how shall we go without sight this Advent, how will we join with our awesome God, who walks alongside us on the way to Bethlehem and Jerusalem and Emmaus, to Paris and Beirut and Minneapolis and St. Louis - holy cities all?

Surely we must begin by proclaiming that “The Word became flesh and dwelled among us” is both a theological and a practical claim upon us. It is a proclamation that God so loved us that God came into the world, was made incarnate (as we claim in our Christian creeds), chose to live in the darkness, in a weary world, in a groaning creation. That is the theology of the gospel writer, but given John’s soaring philosophical, ethereal tendencies, we often forget that the theology demands faithful action; the theology calls us to do God’s work, to work alongside God in healing the world, to be the Word made flesh in our own lives of faith in the darkness, in the weary world. That is the practical claim.

And so we commit once again this Advent season, not to be tempted to wait for the light that is to come but to bear witness to the light already come – the Word made flesh – that calls us to action, to go without sight and travel in the darkness, to be of good courage and faith on the path that Jesus first trod for us, to know that God’s spirit is here in our midst, never leaving us comfortless or without a horizon of hope.

And into the darkness we go – as God’s faithful people – to:

- Stand with our neighbors, near and far, in our common aspirations for healthy communities, fair and just lives together, compassion for the vulnerable, a home for those experiencing homelessness, the beloved community in which dignity and respect for each other inspires our common purpose; to...
- Stand for abundance, when the world says there is never enough; to be beacons of hope in a world where there is too little evidence to hope; to feed hungry bodies and minds and spirits with the plentiful gifts of our good God; and to...
- Stand up and get to work, believing that the Word made flesh calls us to be the body of Christ on earth, in the darkness, in the weary world; to live as 16<sup>th</sup> century mystic Teresa of Avila charges us in this haunting poem:

*Christ Has No Body*

Christ has no body but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which he looks  
Compassion on this world,  
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,  
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.  
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,  
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.  
Christ has no body now but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which he looks  
compassion on this world.  
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

My friends in Christ, stand with someone, stand for something, stand up – for light dawns, love grows, and hope blooms when and where we live as God’s faithful people. May you know God’s grace and truth on your Advent journeys in the weary world until all the world in wonder echoes *Shalom*. Amen.

PRACTICE THIS

>>Reflective politics<<

I first shared this simple piece almost 16 years ago when we were on the cusp – as we are now – of an electoral season surely to be marked by incivility and misinformation...here’s hoping and doing our part!

“I recently heard Scott Simon, the Saturday morning host on National Public Radio, recount a story about Adlai Stevenson, the Illinois Democrat who served as governor and U.S. senator before running as the Democratic nominee for president in 1952 and 1956. At a campaign stop during the 1952 campaign, someone in the crowd yelled, "You've got the votes of all thinking people, Adlai," to which Stevenson is purported to have responded, "That won't be enough, I need a majority.”

As we enter the political season some sixty years later, perhaps we might hope that our politics could at least aspire to some reflection, some connection to the things we care about, some conversations of substance instead of sound bites. But, alas, thinking remains a minority activity. May the voices of our minority be heard above the din of politics as usual.”

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

Preparing for my Senior Honors Seminar this spring term on income equality, I’m exploring some of the literature that has shaped my understanding of philanthropy (an important theme in the course). Return to Andrew Carnegie’s “The Responsibilities of Wealth” (1889) and then explore Jane Addams’s “A Modern Lear” (1896) and recognize the abiding tension in our society that is at the heart of the philanthropic adventure.

I'm delighting in Marilynne Robinson's *The Givenness of Things* (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2015), essays plumbing the depths of the human spirit with her inimitable erudition and wisdom

>>Light dawns on a weary world<<

Theologian and hymn writer, Mary Louise Bringle (b. 1953), penned the words to the hymn that was the theme for our annual Advent Vespers services this year. As I noted above, the hymn seems especially fitting for the world today.

Light dawns on a weary world when eyes begin to see all people's dignity

Light dawns on a weary world the promised day of justice comes

*Refrain:*

The trees shall clap their hands; the dry lands gush with springs;

The hills and mountains shall break forth with singing!

We shall go out in joy, and be led forth in peace,

As all the world in wonder echoes shalom.

Love grows in a weary world when hungry hearts find bread and children's dreams are fed.

Love grows in a weary world, the promised feast of plenty comes.

*Refrain*

Hope blooms in a weary world when creatures once forlorn, find wilderness reborn.

Hope blooms in a weary world, the promised green of Eden comes.

*Refrain*

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>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

- Citizenship and work
- Chief strategy officers

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