

NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Volume Thirteen, Number One (October 2011)

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

(W. Wordsworth, from "The Prelude")

NOTES FROM READERS

>>What you think<<

Happy Reformation Day! We heard a fine chapel homily this morning concerning the scariest of monsters in our lives – our own self-righteousness! Sobering words for those of us who claim to be reform-minded. I hope that your fall has been rich with learning and other adventures.

Stewart Herman, long-time subscriber and professor of religion at Concordia College (MN) wrote after my last Notes with this good reminder:

“I note with interest your theme of abundance (vs. market ideology of endemic scarcity). Nice.

Our faculty read Martha Nussbaum’s *Not for Profit* for our fall workshop. While not a great book, she did thump the drum for compassion as a value critical to democratic health. I think it is implicit in several of your points (6, 7—and 3, especially), but wonder if ideas such as empathy and sympathy (recall the Scottish moralists) as well as compassion might not use a little more foregrounding.” An important extension of Carter’s civility rules, I agree.

Occasionally, I (or my colleagues) refer to items from previous issues of Notes. If you have not been a subscriber previously, and wish to review our conversations, past issues of Notes are available on-line at www.jgacounsel.com. The website version of Notes also includes helpful hyperlinks to sources for purchasing or subscribing to the various publications mentioned in Notes. I thank my friends at Johnson, Grossnickle & Associates for their many years of abiding support for our reflective practice.

REFLECT ON THIS

This issue of Notes finds my thoughts primarily homiletical – and more extended than usual. I trust that you will find in what follows familiar themes applied to circumstances of specific occasions and communities.

>>Ten Years Later<<

A meditation on being called to heal the world

[On the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of 9/11, Augsburg College Chapel, 12 September 2011, Scripture for the day: I Corinthians 1: 18-19; and Matthew 4: 1-11]

*All time is made up of healing of the world.
Return to your ships, which are your broken bodies.
Return to your ships, which have been rebuilt.*

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

I am not really sure what more I can say to mark this tenth anniversary of the horrific tragedies of that Tuesday morning we now know iconically as 9/11. If you have read the newspaper and blog accounts, witnessed the moving ceremonies in Pennsylvania and New York and Washington and elsewhere around the world, listened to those whose family members perished on that fateful day, heard from our nation's leaders – past and present – who offered their words of lament and hope, and engaged with each other in discussion of what it all means to those of us who live in a post 9/11 world, you surely are aware of how our lives have been changed by these events of ten years ago. We are different as human beings because of how evil entered our world on that brilliant Tuesday morning in 2001.

So instead of looking back, perhaps we might best look to the future. What does it mean for those who have lived – and in the case of many of our students, grown up – in this post 9/11 generation?

Clearly the past ten years have offered considerable evidence of a world that is broken – the facts are clear in wars and economic downturns and religious and political strife at home and around the globe.

And yet, there also are important signs of hope found in the midst of this tragedy. And for me, that hope is most powerfully known here at Augsburg – in this chapel, in this college and in this neighborhood, where God's diverse creatures are gathered to be educated, to build community, to be with and for each other in our efforts to live as God's people, to follow the calls each of us has received to be God's people in the world. And the power of this hope is not in some homogenous, one size fits all, vision of this work, but in the very diversity of our backgrounds and gifts and talents and aspirations that together offer the world educated men and women – accountants and scientists and teachers and preachers and artists and social workers and nurses and parents and citizens – who understand that they have been called to meaningful and significant and faithful work on behalf of a world that is broken – no doubt about it – and a world that God loves so very much – faith tells us so!

I find a compelling challenge to address this tension between our brokenness and hope in the work of the chief rabbi of Great Britain, Jonathan Sacks, who has written in his *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility* (Schocken Books, 2005) that all human beings have an innate moral goodness that has been corrupted by the many ways in which we are separated or fragmented from each other (and from God). Life, according to Sacks, is God's call to responsibility. What Sacks is arguing for is the inextricable link between ethics and devotion – between doing good and understanding and believing why. Whether we come to the issue from within the Jewish tradition – with all of its powerful role models of good and faithful lives – or from our own traditions, we still can learn from the message that what we do fragmented from a firm sense of why leads to a fractured world. When we give in to the world's temptations, to its brokenness, we sever our work from its larger purposes in the world. When we heed the call of faith, we place our trust in our awesome and gracious God, and follow

God's call to heal a broken world.

Our scripture readings – assigned for this day – offer us important insights into how we might hold on to this hopeful vision of our lives together here at Augsburg and beyond, despite the fear and anxiety we see and feel and know around us in the world. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, puts it quite bluntly when he proclaims the “foolishness (of the cross) to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” It is at the heart of our faith that nothing we can do will earn us our redemption. It is by faith that we have been saved, and thus we are freed for each other, freed to do God's work in the world. And yet there is a very real tension in this claim in which we must live – it is the tension of living in a world for which the cross is foolishness even as we are called because of the cross to heal this world, to be God's people here and now.

The good news in this morning's familiar story of how Jesus was tempted in the wilderness before he began his formal ministry is that in the example of how Jesus responded to the devil's temptations, we are offered both a clear picture of the broken world's ways and a vision of what God intends for God's world. We are called to be disciples, to be those whose lives and work follow Jesus' example. We are called to heal the world that is broken.

I find the three classic temptations Jesus faced in the wilderness especially instructive today – both as we consider how our lives have changed since 9-11 and how we might go forward with renewed resolve to live more faithfully into God's intentions.

First, there is the devil's temptation to feed our hunger by turning stones to bread. In our own experience, here is the temptation to be anxious and fearful about material needs. Here are the decisions we make, not only about food, but about the priorities we set for spending and saving, about the economic principles and practices that often define our lives together. And here we are, in 2011, embroiled in wars that have cost our country more than \$3 trillion in the last ten years, in an economic tailspin that is leaving families without jobs and home, in a world where what we know to be an abundance of food is not able to reach thousands of our fellow humans – God's good creatures – who are dying of famine in the Horn of Africa. We are called to heal the world and yet the world would tempt us with the threat of scarcity.

And then there is the devil's temptation to worry more about our own safety and security than that of others. I heard a respected military leader proclaim in one of yesterday's many speeches that “We sought the vengeance that was our due after 9-11 and we have been victorious.” It is a temptation that is illustrated by the continued violence and fighting that saps our country's spirit and resources. God has called us to heal the world and yet we perpetuate the cycle of violence that kills and kills again – kills our own people and those of other lands – so that we might purport to be safe and secure.

Finally there is the devil's temptation to rule the world, to sell our souls so that all power might be ours. It is hard these ten years later not to be struck by how little time passed after 9-11 before we put aside the promise of unity and peace that seemed so pregnant in the days following the tragedy. We saw glimpses of people praying together, of reaching across religion and national and ethnic and political boundaries, of common purpose and action to bind up the world's wounds. And then it was gone. Gone so that we might judge as possible terrorists

those whose looks and religions and ethnic identities were different than our own. Gone so that we could accuse each other of naiveté and folly in our political lives. Gone so that we might harangue each other with incivility and hostility. We are called to heal the world and yet the world would have us seek not unity and peace, but fragmentation and hatefulness.

To follow God's call is not easy. We live in the world with all of its temptations, which are difficult to resist. We ourselves are frightened and anxious. Surely among us there are those who have been wounded by economic downturns, touched in some way by violence and hatred, separated from God and each other. And yet we are called – more urgently than ever – to lives of faith, equipped with what we learn and experience here, to be God's people in a broken world.

There is a beautiful passage in Anne Lamott's *Traveling Mercies* (Anchor Books, 1999) that seems fitting in the spirit of this occasion of imagining our calls to heal the world, even when it seems difficult and perhaps on some days, impossible. Lamott writes, first quoting a Leonard Cohen song:

“There are cracks, cracks, in everything, that's how the light gets in.’ I loved that line the first time I read it, sleepless at 2 a.m., with my life falling apart around me. Over the last four years, however, I've come to appreciate that thought in an even deeper way. Cracks aren't just how the light gets in to us in our misery and darkness – it's how light shines through us to other people. My life is not held together with brick and mortar; I gave up on that project long ago, thank God! My life is held together now with translucent crazy glue, and when I cover the cracks in my life I cover up that light that shines through them.

“I may not exactly wear my brokenness on my sleeve these days, but it's there, right under the cuff. It doesn't show when I'm not moving. It doesn't show when I've got my arms clasped safely in front of me. But it does show every time I reach out my hands.”

We pray the words of Rabbi Nachman's Kaddish, the prayer of mourning – not so that we might dwell on what has come before, but so that we might pray with confidence of God's will for our future – a future that calls us to lives of light in the darkness, of healing in the midst of brokenness, of faith in God's will on earth as in heaven.

*Nothing is as whole as a heart that has been broken.
All time is made up of healing of the world.
Return to your ships, which are your broken bodies.
Return to your ships, which have been rebuilt.*

Thanks be to God, who loved the world so very much that he sent his only Son to redeem all of creation, and who then sent us to be light and healers and peacemakers. May it be so. Amen.

>>It Gets Better<<

I preached the following homily in our college chapel earlier this month to mark our celebration of “Coming Out Week” and to reaffirm our commitment as a college “Reconciling in Christ,” welcoming our students and other community members of different gender identities and sexual orientations.

[Scripture assigned for the day: Matthew 10: 24-33]

The hymn we sang to open our chapel service this morning - "All Are Welcome" - was written by Marty Haugen, a fellow Luther College graduate. A couple of years ago, I was in a session with Marty when he told the story of having written this hymn for a particular Christian community and as he delivered it to them, reminding them (and us) that you can't sing this song if you don't live it. All are welcome is not some sentimental bromide, it is a call to faithful action in community and in the world. Words matter. They are our expressions of reality. We should think twice about the words we write and say and sing to make sure we really mean them.

There are compelling words on the wall of this chapel as well. Words that proclaim that this college believes deeply that all are welcome here - in this community, in this chapel. Our status as a college "reconciled in Christ" means specifically that we have committed ourselves to being a community where people of diverse sexual and gender orientations are welcome and embraced as full and vibrant members of our common life. We can't say those words if we don't mean them, if we don't live them.

The scripture assigned for this morning is a Word of grace that provides a rich backdrop to our faithful lives in this place. Jesus's words to his disciples about how God knows and loves each of us, how the darkness cannot overcome the light, how we must live as those known and reconciled, how even the hairs of our heads are counted - stand as a powerful reminder that we are called to the ministry of reconciliation and hospitality precisely because we have been reconciled already through Christ. These are joyful words of significance and inspiration and challenge to the world's ways of darkness and hatred and anonymity.

Augsburg is a college founded on a theological concept, a Word if you will, that has powerful implications for how we are called to live here and now. Our founding scripture from the gospel of John, chapter one, verse 14, proclaims that the Word became flesh. These words mean that God came into human history, became incarnate (the words we hear in Christian creeds), lived among us, showed us the way, the truth and the life, died, was buried and rose again so that we might be freed from our sin to live with and for each other.

It is a deep theological idea, worthy of more than a couple of paragraphs in a brief homily - the main point, though, is clear. Our founders believed that God's ultimate act of hospitality - entering into our world and inviting us into God's love - was an appropriate way to imagine the work of a seminary and college, educating students for lives of meaning and purpose in the world. We are called to lives of hospitality.

There is, however, a related theological idea that also calls us in John's gospel, and it is the fact that this ultimate act of hospitality was rejected by the world. "He came to his own, and his own did not accept him," we read in verse 11. And because God's love and generosity is rejected, the world needs to be healed, justice needs to be pursued, and love needs to be practiced. In other words, hospitality is not enough - we must also fight for justice.

As we affirm and celebrate our work as a reconciled in Christ college community today, we most assuredly are reminded day in and out of the abiding call we have to lives of hospitality and justice. Just a year ago, a hate crime on campus galvanized all of us to stand together and declare that this is

not what God intends for God's faithful people, that we will not be a community marked by fear and violence. But even in that powerful moment, we were challenged to recognize that our call to hospitality, to be a welcoming community, can invite fear and violence against those who do not share our experience or background. We learned that to be hospitable also means that we must work for love and justice and healing. We must work to undo the systems and policies and practices of a world that would demonize and polarize and keep watch in the darkness, afraid of the light.

The recent “It Gets Better” campaign, fighting against bullying and violence perpetrated on young people of diverse sexual and gender orientations, is an example of how we can stand together for both hospitality and justice. Begun a couple of years ago by journalist, Dan Savage, this movement has attracted the attention of a wide community of leaders and citizens who believe that we are called to fight back against the fear and violence, and particularly to help young people know that they are not alone, that they are welcome, and that we will fight for their healthy and safe and just lives in the world.

For those of us in the faith community, we come to the “It Gets Better” campaign with a message that only enhances and extends this important work of hospitality and justice. And it is the message in our gospel for this morning. It is the Word made flesh. It is the powerful word that we must live out day in and day out.

The late Letty Russell, who taught theology at Yale, offers this crisp summary of the word we hear today. She writes, “Just hospitality is the practice of God's welcome by reaching out across difference to participate in God's actions bringing justice and healing in our world of fear and crisis of the ones we call "other." To live out God's welcome as just hospitality is both calling and challenge.”

This is the word that assures us that our God knows us, names us, claims us and loves us. This is the word that we are part of a community of those called by this generous and all-knowing God to do God's work in the world, to be agents of hospitality and justice. This is the word that says it does get better - thanks be to God - and that then inspires and challenges us to get to work to make it so. All are welcome – and we mean it. So be it. Amen.

>>Yes Lives in a No World<<

I first preached this sermon the Sunday after the 9/11 anniversary – I needed to bring a Word of abundance and hope in what seemed like a time of scarcity and anxiety on many fronts. I have since used the basic theme of the sermon in a variety of settings where its message clearly resonates for those seeking to be God’s people in the world.

[Time after Pentecost 25, Scripture for the day: Jonah 3:10-4:11; Philippians 1:21-30; and Matthew 20:1-16]

So – I’ve got this parenting trick for long car rides, where after considerable griping about various issues of pressing importance from the backseat, I pose the following question: Are you a whiner or a wiener? And I know I’m in trouble when my delightful children begin to argue about which one of them “gets” to claim that he/she is the whiner. That wasn’t the idea! Perhaps you can teach me a better trick.

There is something about whining and the human predicament. We love to whine.

Lots of whining in our lessons for today. Jonah is mad about God changing his mind about the Ninevites. The early faithful at Philippi are trying to sort out why they must still suffer in the world since they have been promised eternal life. And the early-in-the-day laborers in Jesus' parable can't fathom the unfair compensation practices of the landowner. God changed his mind? Are you kidding me? This is what the life of faith looks and feels like? No way. God is generous in this way? It's not fair. So they whine and complain and threaten...seem familiar to you?

It should, because it is the order of the day. Just read the newspapers, watch the television news, listen to your co-workers and neighbors. This is mine – don't take it away. This is yours – I want it. Don't confuse me with your facts – this is what I think. When will we get there – I'm bored and scared and impatient.

And now I'd like to whine about whining. Too much hand-wringing, too many dark clouds, too many dire predictions. I love this whimsical poem by Kaylin Haught for the way it jars me out of my whining ways and on a path to explore God's intentions for my life, for our lives...

God Says Yes To Me

*I asked God if it was okay to be melodramatic
and she said yes
I asked her if it was okay to be short
and she said it sure is
I asked her if I could wear nail polish
or not wear nail polish
and she said honey
she calls me that sometimes
she said you can do just exactly
what you want to
Thanks God I said
And is it even okay if I don't paraphrase
my letters
Sweetcakes God said
who knows where she picked that up
what I'm telling you is
Yes Yes Yes*

Yes Yes Yes. This morning, in this Time after Pentecost, we listen in on various conversations about what God intends for God's faithful people. And these are, I would contend, conversations about God's generosity, about God's Yes to the world's No!

My teacher Martin Marty has written of the need for us to pay attention to the ways in which God is depicted in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures as generous, a generosity that runs counter to careful, rational, human calculations. From acts of creation to covenants with chosen people to presence in the midst of anguish and suffering, Marty argues, the character of God is marked with generous self-giving. Yes Yes Yes. And the appropriate response to this Yes is to give thanks and get to work – with glad and generous hearts and hands and minds.

But, of course, this is not easy for those of us inclined to whine. We're like Jonah and the Philippians and the early in the day laborers. We live in a No world and our expectations are based on what it takes to succeed in that world. Toe the line or face the consequences. You promised us we'd have what we need to thrive. You owe me what I've earned. It's hard to say Yes when everything around us seems premised on No.

This morning, I find myself particularly drawn to Paul's letter to the Philippians when it comes to understanding the tensions of living as God's faithful people in the world. I'm not sure we can imagine the lives of these 1st century Christians, but I do think we can recognize the dynamic of a community learning to work together. Paul is writing to them 30 or 40 years after Jesus has been crucified. And his concerns are very practical. As they have formed a community of those who believe in the risen Christ, they have encountered some of the sorts of problems that any community might face. Paul's words to the Philippians offer us a glimpse of a community intimidated by its opponents, hard-pressed to live in the world and yet live a life worthy of the gospel, striving to remain united – side by side – when the world around them tempts them with fruitful labor. Paul writes not with easy answers, but with words of encouragement and solidarity and blessing for the privilege they have been granted to live Yes lives in a No world.

What a rare gift it is for those of us who are part of this community to have this same inspiration and challenge in our lives. In this community of faith, we too acknowledge the gifts we have been given – the gifts of faith and community and service – even as we embrace our calls to pursue Yes lives in the midst of a No world.

So what might our Yes lives look like? Here are three brief scenarios of how we might pursue our lives of generosity – scenarios meant, like the Apostle Paul's letters, not to tell us what to do but to encourage us to live faithfully in the tensions between Yes and No.

The generosity of our place

The concept of generosity of place is much on my mind these days in my work at Augsburg. The original motto for Augsburg Theological Seminary and College is: "And the Word became flesh" (originally in Norwegian, of course!) – and so it does, here, in our midst, God with us. Can you imagine any more generous act? We believe that Augsburg College practices generosity most authentically when it lives as the Word made flesh – present, rooted, of service, faithful.

I have long believed that colleges (and churches) are indigenous communities – that is, they are native to a particular place, a particular environment, a particular set of values and practices that define us – and that means something for the way we live our lives, it means something for the ways in which we understand the generosity of place and values and presence...

Here at Our Saviour's, our work during the past several years in exploring our sense of place – in this neighborhood especially – has lifted up some of the tensions in living generously in this place. There are no easy answers for a church community comprising many of us who do not daily live or work in this neighborhood, but I believe we must still struggle with the tensions if we are to live Yes lives in this neighborhood. We cannot simply drop in on Wednesday evenings and Sunday mornings – which, we must admit, is what most of us do – and expect to understand the needs and aspirations of our neighbors.

The poet and essayist, Wendell Berry, whose work I return to often for guidance, writes these wise words in his prose poem, "Damage" – "No expert knows everything about every place, not even

everything about any place. If one's knowledge of one's whereabouts is insufficient, if one's judgment is unsound, then expert advice is of little use."

Berry's good advice is extended by the work of friend and colleague, Jay Walljasper, whose *The Great Neighborhood Book: A Do-It-Yourself Guide to Placemaking* (New Society Publishers, 2007) draws us into his "neighborhood love story" with lots of practical advice to live generously in our place.

A few of his principles of placemaking are relevant to our Yes lives in this neighborhood:

- (1) The community is the expert (no, consultants aren't better than your neighbors when it comes to good ideas for our neighborhood!)
- (2) You can't do it alone (look for the right partners)
- (3) They'll always say "It can't be done" (take it as a good sign when others tell you why it won't work – you're probably on the right track)
- (4) You can see a lot by just observing (look for what works)
- (5) Make the connections (working together adds up to more than the sum of the parts)
- (6) Start with petunias (sweat the small things because they set the stage for real change)
- (7) Money is not the issue (a spirited community will find ways around financial obstacles)
- (8) You are never finished (managing after a project is finished will ensure that great places abide.)

Walljasper quotes Mexican novelist, Carlos Fuentes, who says "The citizen takes his city for granted far too often. He (and she) forgets to marvel." In other words, we forget to say Yes!

"The Word became flesh" is both a theological and practical claim. How can we be even more generous in our whereabouts and place as the body of Christ here and now, as the Word made flesh in this place, as Our Saviour's Lutheran Church on the corner of 24th and Chicago?

Multiply your mind by giving it away

Let us now turn to lives of generosity in the settings that many of us occupy – the organizations and businesses and neighborhoods in which you daily live and work and bring your faith and gifts to bear. Perhaps it is a corporation or a family business or a social service agency or a school or church – whatever their size or scope, organizations are the means by which we get things done in the world. Allow me to confess, as a lifelong organizational person, we need all of our glad and generous hearts to help organizations live up to their better natures! We need to discern and embrace our vocations to do God's good and generous work – to do the work of Yes – in the midst of settings too often shaped by the demands of No.

But what can we do? I've recently been reading lots of literature on helping organizations to embrace and sustain a culture of innovation – i.e., to create organizational cultures that are constantly looking for new and different ways to do things, to make products, to deliver services; to save souls, educate students, heal the sick. You get the picture. I'm not surprised by most of what I read about this work. Make a plan, think outside of whatever box you're in, provide incentives for innovative work, and hold people accountable for being innovative – pretty standard leadership work. But then I happened upon the writing of Mark Federman, a Canadian scholar, whose writings on innovation include this provocative suggestion: "Multiply your mind by giving it away." And Federman means exactly what he says – be generous, be charitable, give instead of always taking. Because when you are generous with your mind, with your knowledge and education and other gifts,

you help to create organizations and neighborhoods and agencies and churches and schools that are marked not by the scarcity of the world, but by the abundance of what's possible when generosity of mind and heart and hands and spirit is our guiding principle.

How will you give away your mind in the organizations and communities you serve? I find examples of such generosity right here in our church and in our neighborhood – in the work of Our Saviour's Community Services, in our hospitality efforts, in our partnerships with other congregations. I'm sure you have your own examples of how someone in your workplace or neighborhood has multiplied his or her mind by giving it away. These days I'm especially struck by the ways in which Augsburg staff member Brian Noy and his many colleagues who run our Campus Kitchen program are illustrating this generosity of mind and spirit. Campus Kitchen's core work is led by students who collect leftover foodstuffs from our cafeteria and area restaurants, prepare and then deliver more than 3,000 meals a month to our neighbors in Phillips and Cedar-Riverside. It is good and important work. What I have seen in the past couple of years, though, is that Brian and his colleagues have not been content simply to stay the course. They have focused our attention on the important role that food plays in our lives – as sustenance for our bodies, as fellowship for our community, as politics and economics in our neighborhood and world. They have multiplied their minds by giving them away to all of us. And the results are staggering – community gardens on the edge of campus that bring together neighbors and students and children; a Farmer's Market on campus each week and relationships with organic farmers from across the region; composting of leftover everything in the cafeteria; and so much more – abundance through generosity.

We are called to lives of faith in this community surely, but even more so in those settings where we live and work day in and out. How will you live Yes lives by multiplying your mind and knowledge and experience – by giving it away so that it serves God's abundant intentions for God's people and world?

Interfaith living

Finally, I challenge all of us to consider what it means to be generous in living alongside our neighbors who do not share our faith. We live in diverse communities where our various faiths demand of us a generosity of spirit and means, where we are called to lives together in support of healthy and just and compassionate communities. We are called by the God we know in Jesus Christ to say Yes Yes Yes alongside those who know God in other ways – to proclaim that we have been freed for lives of generosity in service to all God's good creation and creatures. While the world divides and polarizes and demonizes the other, we are called to find common purpose, to live as God intends, to live with and for each other.

As we consider our interfaith work in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, we are convinced that dialogue and service must be interwoven in all we do. We believe that what we learned through recent efforts to encourage interfaith dialogue with our neighbors is something we must do each day. We are working hard on safety, youth activities, infrastructure plans, and economic development to model interfaith living within our neighborhood (Concrete example in Urban Scrubs Camp).

This work is guided by the 20th century political philosopher and theologian John Courtney Murray, SJ, who wrote in his book, *We Hold These Truths* (Sheed and Ward, 1960):

“Barbarism...is the lack of reasonable conversation according to reasonable laws. Here the word ‘conversation’ has its twofold Latin sense. It means living together and talking together. Barbarism threatens when men cease to live together according to reason, embodied in law and custom, and incorporated in a web of institutions that sufficiently reveal rational influences.... Barbarism likewise strikes when men cease to talk together... when dialogue gives way to a series of monologues; when parties to the conversation cease to listen to one another...”

Murray’s challenge is clear: How shall we recover our capacity for conversation – both genuine living and talking together?

I find additional inspiration for this important work in the example of the late Henri Nouwen, a Roman Catholic priest who wrote a moving challenge in his *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (Doubleday, 1975). His challenge illumines for me what we are called to be and do in our interfaith living:

Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place.

It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines.

It is not to lead our neighbor into a corner where there are no alternatives left, but to open a wide spectrum of options for choice and commitment.

It is not an educated intimidation of good books, good stories, and good works, but the liberation of fearful hearts so that words can find root and bear ample fruit.

It is not a method of making our God and our way into the criteria of happiness, but the opening of an opportunity for others to find their God and their way.

The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create emptiness—not a fearful emptiness, but a friendly emptiness where strangers can enter and discover themselves as created free; free to sing their own songs, speak their own languages, dance their own dances; free also to leave and follow their own vocations.

We live Yes lives in a No world when we learn that this sort of hospitality, this sort of interfaith living, is at the heart of our lives as God’s faithful people. Eboo Patel, who founded the Interfaith Youth Corps in Chicago – and who is a regular visitor to Augsburg – challenged us with this question in a recent presentation, a question we might address together here at Our Saviour’s: “What is it in your experience of the cross of Jesus Christ that calls you, that calls us, into the generous work of interfaith living?”

Yes Yes Yes, God says again and again. What say you? And God’s people say together...Amen!

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- Hospitality is not enough

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