

NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Volume Twenty, Number Four (April 2019)

"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 Spring, all! We are in the midst of the academic year end rituals that mark our common lives. The weather is cooperating (as opposed to last year when it snowed just before commencement!) as we look to our commencement ceremonies next week – held this year for the first-time off campus in the U.S. Bank Stadium, where some 12,000 folks will gather to celebrate the class of 2019. I also have the wonderful personal opportunity to celebrate my son Thomas's graduation from DeLaSalle High School in Minneapolis later in May. Life goes on in wonderful ways!

Thanks to the many of you who wrote with congratulations for my AFP honor as "Outstanding Fundraising Professional." It was a great privilege to stand alongside many friends and colleagues who have helped shape our profession.

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. I thank my friends at Johnson, Grossnickle & Associates for their many years of abiding support for our reflective practice.

REFLECT ON THIS

>>Called to know and be known<<

The second of my three chapel homilies exploring the historic theological and scriptural threads of Augsburg's identity focused on our expansive understanding of what it means to know and to be known.

Scripture: Sirach 4: 11-19, Mark 9: 38-40

This morning, I continue with the second of a series of chapel homilies focused on the theological and scriptural threads that have shaped Augsburg's identity over its 150-year history. Earlier this semester, I lifted up the influence of Hans Nielsen Hauge on the founders of Augsburg – an influence that has shaped our commitment to meaningful work. Today I want to share some reflections on the core of our academic mission – how we are called to know and be known.

To be honest, there are some who see a significant tension between the Haugean tradition -with its focus on the practical skills of building healthy economies and communities – and the historic intellectual tradition of our Lutheran faith – with its deep commitment to education and the

teaching ministry of the church. In fact, some would argue that the Haugean tradition was anti-intellectualist, eschewing the traditional standards of a rigorous and excellent education, a learned clergy and a belief in objective truth. I want to counter that argument with the claim that Augsburg's academic mission has been informed by a more expansive understanding of knowledge – knowledge that reflects our attention to God's wide-ranging work in our midst, knowledge that is grounded in our belief that we know because we are known.

The logic of my argument is illustrated in our scripture readings for this morning.

The brief encounter between the disciple John and Jesus, found in Mark's gospel, goes to the heart of God's abundant and generous work in our midst. John, quite literally playing the devil's advocate, arrogantly claims that this other person casting out demons in Jesus's name must be stopped. The sub-text here, of course, is that only we – your disciples – have the power, the knowledge, the right to heal and minister and rule. The rebuke from Jesus sets the record straight, "Whoever is not against us is for us." In other words, the work we are called to do should be informed by and supported and complemented by what others say and do and believe. Why would God limit the sources of knowledge and experience that help us heal the sick, free the captives, work for justice and love each other – God's intentions for God's people and all of creation? There is indeed a wideness in God's mercy – and knowledge.

And then we turn to Sirach (sometimes known as Ecclesiasticus), where we find this soaring love letter to the ways of wisdom. For those known by God comes this invitation to follow the ways of wisdom wherever it leads – to love life, to be filled with joy, to live secure. To walk on tortuous paths, full of fear and dread, tormented by discipline and governed by her ordinances. And then to be brought back to the straight ways. For me, this describes the journey of learning for those who are known. It is a journey that takes us not to one form of knowledge – to one way of knowing – to some objective truth once and for all. It takes us where the ways of wisdom lead – to places both tortuous and difficult and frightening and at the same time joyful and life-giving. This is a vision of knowing that knows no bounds, of knowledge that seeks after the wideness of God's creation.

So what does all of this mean for the educational experience and academic mission we pursue here at Augsburg?

I believe that one of the most significant gifts of our scriptural and theological heritage is our commitment to humble and critical inquiry.

We are humble because we have been called by the divine, the One who knows us, and we understand that our own knowledge and actions are never complete, that there are many truths yet to be uncovered, that the truths that others have found may help inform ours, that we may be wrong and need to amend our knowledge. What a significant challenge this is to the competing ideologies that too often claim truth once and for all and thus polarize and stymie conversation and genuine learning. Our late colleague at Capital University in Ohio, Tom Christenson, has written powerfully of a Lutheran way of knowing that is grounded in wonder, openness, recognition to connectedness, freedom, critical faithfulness, engaged suspiciousness – these are the ways of humility.

And we use our critical skills because we are not afraid of the answers we may find and live into. As those already known, we believe that God calls us to lives of asking questions, of seeking an ever more full and accurate understanding of the world and our experience, of giving away our minds and hearts to serve our neighbor in whatever our vocational journey. Martin Luther taught all of us to

ask “what does this mean?” The late Lutheran theologian, Joseph Sittler, has argued provocatively that the purposes of a liberal arts education in a Lutheran institution is to “annihilate innocence” about the realities of the world and human experience, so that we might live authentically as God’s people, awake and vigilant to what we are called to be and do.

Our humble and critical inquiry then leads us to seek the ways of wisdom wherever they are found. I have learned so much from educator (and Augsburg honorary alumnus) Parker Palmer about this journey toward wisdom. Palmer talks about the community that gathers around a particular challenge or issue or what we might call a “wicked problem.” He describes how when a community gathers to explore the challenge, we must seek to bring all perspectives, all ways of knowing, all sources of knowledge to bear. It is when we do this, Palmer claims, that we experience what the poet Rilke calls “the grace of great things.” The grace of great things – the wideness of God’s mercy and knowledge.

This journey to the grace of great things, the ways of wisdom, thus challenges us to never put limits on what and where and who might be sources of knowledge and perspective that enhance our understanding of God’s work in our midst.

I think especially about what we have learned in recent years here at Augsburg through our various interfaith efforts. Grounded firmly in our Lutheran faith and intellectual tradition which calls us to ask “what does this mean?” and to watch for what God is doing in our midst, we have engaged our diverse students and neighbors in exploring how the pluralistic faith traditions of the world have so much to learn from each other as they imagine how to live together in the world, to respond to the great and daunting challenges of our times, and to chart a path forward that sees faith not as a source of division, but as a constructive force for good. When we gather as a community around the challenges of interfaith dialogue and living, we come willing to listen to each other so that we might learn from other; we come in humility so that we might be open to wisdom that comes from the experiences and traditions and cultures of others; we come with a critical eye for how our own privilege often blinds us to the opportunity to expand our knowledge; we come longing to know the grace of great things.

We come as Tom Christenson challenged us to tell “the Whole Human Story in depth and breadth honestly – to be radical truth-tellers” – and at the same time to stand together in a community of hope. Radical truth telling in a community of hope. Called to know as we are known. There is indeed a wideness in God’s mercy that is the deeply radical truth at the heart of our community of hope – as it has been for 150 years and ever shall be so. Thanks be to God. Amen.

>>Called together and called out<<

My third chapel homily focuses on the call into community so that we might be called out and sent forth to serve our neighbors.

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

This morning – during this sacred week, this Holy Week – I offer the third of three homilies exploring the historic scriptural and theological threads that have informed Augsburg University’s identity and mission on the occasion of our 150th anniversary. Earlier this semester, we first discussed the Haugean tradition of meaningful work (“Called to Work”), and then our expansive understanding of knowledge and what it means to be known (“Called to Know and Be Known”). Today, 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 – “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.

PRACTICE THIS

>>Centered peace<<

As I addressed our graduates at a recent Baccalaureate service, I shared with them my hope that they might depart with a peace that passes human understanding – a peace that comes from living a centered life. Here is an excerpt from my remarks...

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

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

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

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

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

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

>>Interfaith at Augsburg<<

The following is a part of the announcement establishing Interfaith at Augsburg – a new institute that will promote inter-religious learning and living. I am proud of how we are situating this work in the context of our historic identity and our contemporary place and community.

"Augsburg University's historic theological and intellectual roots, its location in the heart of a religiously pluralistic neighborhood, and its current robust and innovative initiatives to promote interfaith living and dialogue combine to make the case for establishing **Interfaith at Augsburg: An Institute to Promote Inter-Religious Learning and Living**, which will support myriad curricular and co-curricular programs on campus, organize innovative international initiatives, and serve as a resource for universities, faith communities and other organizations as they promote inter-religious understanding and living.

Our case

Augsburg University was founded as a seminary in 1869. Its mission: to train pastors for the urban immigrants who came to Minneapolis to work in lumberyards and grain mills. Nearly 150 years later, Augsburg continues to be shaped by the Lutheran intellectual tradition and the theological contributions of the Reformers. Situated in a neighborhood home to numerous immigrant communities, our diverse students, faculty, and staff experience religious difference not just as a subject for academic study, but as a lived reality in their daily lives together. In classrooms, labs, worship areas, and common spaces, students regularly interact with persons of diverse faith traditions as they fulfill the curricular and co-curricular requirements of their respective programs of study.

Both Luther and Calvin were clear that God is actively engaged in every realm of life. The Reformers emphasized that God calls us to be loving, generous, gracious, and hospitable neighbors. As an urban institution, we approach our neighbor in a spirit of humility and curiosity, seeking to listen and learn while we discern together how we might create a society where **religious diversity is a constructive force serving the common good.**

In his preface to "Commentary on the Epistle to The Galatians", Luther wrote *"Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain you could stake your life on it a thousand times. Such faith frees us to serve everyone, suffer everything, out of love and praise to God who shows us such grace."*

As Lutherans, we also have the gift of the theological concept of vocation—the belief that God calls us to lives of meaning and significance in the world. We believe we are called to help our students discern their own vocations and to equip them with the skills to live out those callings. With faculty

who are committed to interdisciplinary teaching and experiential education, we believe Augsburg is uniquely suited to helping prepare young people for the realities of the 21st Century – as productive members of a global workforce and as engaged citizens of healthy communities and organizations.

Our interfaith initiatives at Augsburg are deeply informed by this distinctive theological and intellectual tradition. For our community, interfaith work is not a luxury – it is a necessity.”

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

I want to lift up some remarkable scholarship being done by many colleagues across the academy (and beyond) on the concept of vocation. Three volumes, each edited by David S. Cunningham, have been published by Oxford University Press. They include *At This Time and in This Place: Vocation and Higher Education* (2016); *Vocation Across the Academy: A New Vocabulary for Higher Education* (2017); and *Hearing Vocation Differently: Meaning, Purpose, and Identity in the Multi-Faith Academy* (2019).

Joshua Yates and Michaela Accardi have compiled a *Field Guide for Urban University-Community Partnerships* (Thriving Cities Lab at the University of Virginia, 2019), which features among other fine institutions a summary of our work here at Augsburg

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>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

- Culture change
- Big ideas!

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