

NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Volume Twenty-Two, Number One (October 2020)

"What we have loved, others will love, and we will teach them how."
(W. Wordsworth, from "The Prelude")

NOTES FROM READERS

>>What you think<<

Dear friends, You are on my mind and in my heart in these continuing pandemic times and in the midst of this raucous and disturbing political season. May you find calm and peace as we keep our eye on a farther horizon.

This is the message I sent last week to our Augsburg community:

“Dear Augsburg community,

We are all deeply aware of the critical moment for our country in next week’s national elections. Emotions are running especially high as we negotiate very different visions of the future for our country and world, even as we navigate the pressures of a pandemic, a racial reckoning, and economic uncertainty.

For the Augsburg community, this moment is very much informed by our shared vision for the work of our university. In *Augsburg150: The Sesquicentennial Plan*, we state that vision in this way:

As a new kind of urban, student-centered university, we are educating Auggies as stewards of an inclusive democracy, engaged in their communities and uniquely equipped to navigate the complex issues of our time.

We all are indeed stewards of our democracy, engaged and equipped for a time such as this, and our responsibilities are clear.

Those of us who are eligible must vote - that is our fundamental duty as citizens.

But democratic engagement is much more than voting. It is joining with our colleagues to protest, to advocate, to organize, and to make our voices heard on behalf of the causes and communities and commitments that we believe in.

Please know that in the days and weeks ahead, even if the election and its aftermath is fraught with discord and disruption, we will stand with you in our shared commitment to democratic engagement. We will work to keep you safe. We will support your efforts to be heard. We will be stewards of an inclusive democracy. And we will emerge from this moment even more dedicated to Augsburg’s mission and vision.

Stay strong, my friends!”

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

>>Through truth to freedom – by way of reconciliation - redux<<

I included a draft of a potential editorial in the last issue of Notes. Subsequently, it was published in the Saint Paul *Pioneer Press* in a slightly edited form. Here is the link if you are interested:

<https://twitter.com/AugsburgU/status/1311674005338951693>

>>Augsburg's Bold Promise<<

Here is the homily I preached during the first week of our new academic year – in a safe and socially-distanced in-person chapel service!

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. (1 Corinthians 12:4-11)

I want to talk with you this morning about promises – bold promises, in the spirit of the theme for this fall's chapel services – bold promises that we make and keep with and for each other here at Augsburg – bold promises that are urgently needed in these pandemic times.

The first promise is kept right here in this gathering of the faithful – in person or virtually – and it is the promise of our awesome God, who calls us in our baptisms to be members of what the Apostle Paul calls the body of Christ. In that baptismal covenant or promise, we are named, claimed and called to be God's child.

One of the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic for the church is that we have not been able to gather as we normally would – I've logged 26 straight weeks of livestreamed worship in my living room – but I also am reminded every Sabbath that we are the body of Christ, wherever we may find ourselves. And though I miss the in-person community, and long for its return, I am more and more convinced that the body of Christ lives and breathes in the everyday acts of justice and compassion and service to neighbor – the work God calls us to in our baptisms.

The 16th century mystic Teresa of Avila captures this baptismal promise in these provocative lines:

*Christ has no body now but yours
No hands, no feet on earth but yours
Yours are the eyes through which He looks
compassion on this world
Christ has no body now on earth but yours*

The second promise is made possible because of the foundation that is set by God's promise to us in our baptisms. Augsburg University exists because generations of faithful folks have believed that God calls us to the work of education for service to neighbor. It is our mission as a university that promises our students what we call a "three-dimensional education." I share this promise with our students each summer during their orientation to Augsburg.

We promise you an education to make a living – yes, to gain the knowledge and skills and networks that will equip you to pursue a career or profession. We believe in the dignity of work – it is part of our distinctive heritage as a Lutheran institution – and we know that work of all sorts, the many gifts that Paul names in our scripture for today, help to create healthy economies, communities and organizations.

But it doesn't end there. Though work is important, it is not the whole story. We also promise you an education to make a life. What else matters beyond work? We believe that your calling or vocation goes beyond your work to include your many roles – as a child, a sibling, a parent, a member of a faith or moral community, a citizen – and much of what we do here at Augsburg seeks to help you discern how those various aspects of your life fit together. It is how you make a life.

The final dimension of our educational promise is the claim that we equip you to make or build community. This is the bold promise that the ways you make a living and make a life are never done in a vacuum and we believe that the wisdom and skills of building a community are essential to living out our vocations in the world. In my now 15 years at Augsburg, I have witnessed time and again how this commitment to building community is baked into our culture and programs – and we see the impact of our graduates who carry these community-building values and skills into the world.

And this, then, is the foundation for the third promise I want to name. Earlier this summer, Bishop Mark Hanson, who leads our Interfaith at Augsburg Institute, reminded me that the Apostle Paul's use of the body of Christ imagery – which is described later in the 12th chapter of 1st Corinthians – must be understood in the context of the claim he makes in our reading for this morning. It's a simple line in verse four, where Paul writes, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." Ah, there it is – often overlooked. The promise – **the bold promise** – is that everything we do as we live out our baptismal promise; as we learn to make a living, make a life, and build a community; is intended to serve the common good, to serve our neighbors, to be God's compassion and justice in the world. We name that bold promise on the side of the old Science Hall, where we proclaim that Augsburg is "small to our students and big for the world."

What do these promises look like in action? I have had the honor this past summer to watch with great pride the work of Professor Katie Clark from our Nursing department to live out these various promises, and just last week I accompanied Professor Clark as she went about her efforts to meet the needs of those experiencing homelessness and living in encampments. In addition to her work as a faculty member, Katie also heads the Augsburg Health Commons at Central Lutheran Church, a drop-in center for those experiencing homelessness that focuses on meeting basic needs for hygiene,

safety and human relationships. I believe that Katie Clark personifies the bold promises we make with and for each other here at Augsburg, and I think we can learn important lessons for our promise-keeping through Katie's example. Here's what I've learned from Katie...here's her public narrative of promise-keeping.

“Katie Clark, child of God – called in her baptism to the work of healing the world.

Katie Clark, nurse and teacher – making a living (though she likely deserves to make more!) with work that has meaning and dignity and purpose.

Katie Clark, citizen nurse and teacher – making a life as mother, spouse, daughter, sibling, caregiver, healthcare provider, repairer of the breach in our city.

Katie Clark, human being – building community as a caregiver who focuses on the need for relationships and networks of support, and not simply on the transactions that too often define health care.

Katie Clark, public servant – generously sharing her gifts of the Spirit in mutual service to the common good.”

So, what's your public narrative of promise-keeping? Let's tell each other how we live out these promises in our lives, because the world so needs our promises made and kept.

Both Katie and I have been inspired by the work of poet, essayist and farmer Wendell Berry, who writes in his essay, “Health is Membership” these powerful words:

“I take literally the statement in the Gospel of John that God loves the world. I believe that the world was created and approved by love, that it subsists, coheres, and endures by love, and that, insofar as it is redeemable, it can be redeemed only by love. I believe that divine love, incarnate and indwelling in the world, summons the world always toward wholeness...”

And maybe that's the boldest promise we know – a promise kept by our God who loves us so much – a promise we now make with and for each other – a promise to love those afflicted with a virus; to love those unhoused and unfed; to love those oppressed by systemic racism; to love those who hate us; to love as we are loved. To love so that the world may be redeemed. We promise. May it be so. Amen.

>>This Both/And Moment<<

I offered this “First Word” at the fall meeting of the Augsburg Board of Regents – a word for our times.

At the heart of our Lutheran Christian faith is Martin Luther's claim of *simul Justus et peccator* – at once, simultaneously, justified and sinful – a tension we live in as faithful people in the world.

What this theological equation means for us is very practical. It is a way of seeing and knowing that focuses not on the usual human equation of *either/or*, but rather on God's call for us to see and know as *both/and* people.

So, what are the both/and issues we are facing in the world now? Here are a few for us to consider...

Both responding to a global pandemic and keeping our commitment to healthy economies and communities.

Both rooted in a particular faith tradition and open to the traditions and experiences of others.

Both appreciative of the many threads of our institutional identity and willing to admit that we support systemic racism in our structures and policies.

Both concerned for the safety of our campus community and committed to the well-being of our neighbors.

Both focused on the needs of our students in these pandemic days and looking to a future that will be changed, perhaps transformed.

Both concerned about fiduciary challenges and committed to the strategic and generative conversations that promise future sustainability.

Both full of lament for all that has been lost and full of thanksgiving for the calls we have to do God's healing and reconciling work in the world.

PRACTICE THIS

>>Reflective politics<<

Every four years – in the October issue – I have to include this oft-repeated anecdote with the fervent hope it might come true...sometime soon!

"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-eight 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<<

I continue to read across a wide range of interests – some established, some new. Here is a sampling of what is in my pile of books...

Harvard Professor Michael Sandel has written *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020), calling to account of culture of “winners and losers.”

Barbara Brown Taylor's *Always a Guest* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 2020) includes a variety of sermons and stories that recount her continuing journey of faith in a pluralistic world.

Kaitlin B. Curtice has written *Native: Identity, Belonging and Rediscovering God* (Brazos, 2020), sharing her own story as a Native American, a Christian, and a poet.

Directly relevant to our pandemic times is Walter Brueggemann's *Virus as a Summons to Faith* (Cascade Books, 2020), a series of reflections on scripture in a time of loss, grief and anxiety.

Finally, Augsburg's own Chris Stedman – distinguished alum, now adjunct faculty member – has published *IRL: Finding Realness, Meaning, and Belonging in our Digital Lives* (Broadleaf Books, 2020). If you're interested in hearing Chris talk about his book, join us for a webinar on November 10, from 4-5 pm (Central). You can register here:

https://augsburg.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_4Vo70zY1StWrKj-0iTuzFw...

>>A prayer<<

During these fraught times, I find myself drawn again and again to this familiar prayer – though found in the service books of my Lutheran Christian church, in some meaningful ways fitting for all of who walk this earth...

Lord God, you have called your servants
to ventures of which we cannot see the ending,
by paths yet untrodden,
through perils unknown.
Give us faith to go out with good courage,
not knowing where we go,
but only that your hand is leading us
and your love supporting us;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And the people say, Amen!

>>Subscription information<<

Subscriptions to Notes are simple to establish. Send me an email at augpres@augspres.edu, ask to be added to the list, and the listserv will confirm that you have been subscribed to the list. Please feel free to forward your email versions of Notes to others—they then can subscribe by contacting me. The current and archive issues of Notes are available on-line at www.jgacounsel.com.

>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

- Trusting institutions - again

- Stories we tell to ourselves and each other
- Big ideas!

(c) Paul Pribbenow, 2020