

## NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

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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<<

Greetings, my friends, in these early Spring days. We have finished our 151<sup>st</sup> academic year at Augsburg and will celebrate our graduates – virtually again – at our commencement ceremonies this week. Where has the time gone, we ask, as we have navigated through these pandemic months. Certainly we breathed a sigh of relief and gratitude when a jury returned verdicts of guilty on all charges for Derek Chauvin in the murder of George Floyd. But at a vigil the evening the verdicts were delivered, our remarkable students spoke longingly that this one moment of justice accomplished would not be an anomaly and they demanded that all of us – all of us – stand together to fight for justice for all – all of us! May it be so.

I pray that you and yours are safe and well. My family is vaccinated – thank God for science and medicine – and we are already planning for long-delayed family gatherings this summer. How good it will be to once again gather in person together – and how important it will be to never again take for granted the gift of human community.

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

>>Breakfast with Jesus<<

I preached this homily in the Augsburg Chapel at the conclusion of this historic academic year.

### ***Jesus Appears to Seven Disciples***

*21 After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. 2 Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin,<sup>[a]</sup> Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. 3 Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.*

*4 Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." 6 He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. 7 That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the*

*Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. <sup>8</sup> But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards<sup>[a]</sup> off. <sup>9</sup> When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." <sup>11</sup> So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. <sup>12</sup> Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. <sup>14</sup> This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.*

## John 21: 1-14

Biblical commentators suggest that the 21<sup>st</sup> chapter of John's gospel, from which we have read this morning, was added to the original narrative. And as is always the case in such findings, the question is why. What was it that those who edited the gospel felt needed to be added to complete the story? What was going on in the community of those for whom John's gospel account was meaningful that required 25 additional verses?

For some of us, these are intriguing questions of Biblical and theological scholarship; for others of us, not so much so. I might suggest, though, that for all of us – situated here some 1900 years after the gospel was circulated – these additional verses are most relevant. In fact, I might be so bold as to say that chapter 21 is meant especially for you and me here at Augsburg, in this chapel, during this Easter season, near the end of our academic year, in the midst of a global pandemic.

Let's imagine ourselves in the place of the disciples in these days after: after the intense years of ministry across the countryside, after the triumphal entry to Jerusalem, after the Passover, after poignant and emotional final meals together, after betrayal and denials, after the cross, after an empty tomb. Now what do we do?

Well, I guess you do what you know how to do. Simon Peter says it plainly, "I am going fishing." I'm going back to the life I knew before I was called away. I want what's normal. I'm going back to the familiar and mundane, as if these years with Jesus were simply a dream, ultimately a nightmare. I can go back and earn a living and get on with things, and the others join in. But there are no fish to find – the familiar and mundane is empty and disappointing.

And then there he is on the lakeshore. A vague figure, who knows of their disappointment and emptiness. "You have no fish, have you?" he asks. "No," they answer. "Cast your nets again and you will find some," and so their nets are filled beyond measure (153 fish, we're told a few verses later!) and they recognize him as Jesus their Lord.

And as they rush to greet him, filled once again with the joy and abundance they have known in their lives together, Jesus says simply "Come and have breakfast." There they are, gathered around the campfire, breaking bread together and eating the fish he helped them to catch. There they are, afraid to ask how this was possible, afraid to break the spell of the moment – and yet they knew it was the Lord! He is Risen, He is Risen Indeed.

I would guess that all of us have had moments when we have this sense of living in the days after ... My spouse, Abigail, has worked over the years in the arts community and she talks about how the preparation for an art exhibit or performance and production leads you through a series of emotions that can leave you pretty dejected when the production is over. Post-production blues, she calls them. Others of us might feel that way about the end of our college years here at Augsburg – what

do I do now? Others among us may be retiring, wondering what will offer meaning and direction in the days ahead. Perhaps your examples are less extreme, though still unsettling. A relationship ends, a job search falls apart, a family splits...what do we do in the days after? And all of us are left with our questions about what will we do after this pandemic is behind us?

Perhaps, like the disciples, it's back to what is familiar, to what we've always done. Or maybe it's coping with the disappointment and anxiety with a sense of fatalism – this is the best I can do and hope for. And perhaps, we too find our nets empty. The world defines success in ways we simply can't live up to.

And then he is there, standing on the lakeshore – just as when he first called to us, “follow me” – sending words of encouragement our way, instructing us to cast our nets again. And all of a sudden, we recognize our Lord and he invites us to come to the table, to break the bread together, to lay at the altar our burdens and joys, our disappointments as well as the bounty and abundance of our nets overflowing. He is risen; He is risen indeed.

Here is the powerful Easter message in these days after... the message we have from John's gospel that is so relevant to our 21<sup>st</sup> century lives of faith.

*Yes, you must go back to your lives in the world.* But now, your lives in the world have been transformed by the power of the resurrection. Now the calls you have received – your vocations – have a different meaning and trajectory. In your daily lives, God is alive and acting so that you might know and make real God's will for the world. What the world counts as success has been set aside for all time. Now your lives serve the Risen Lord.

*No, I have not left you alone.* I am here with you in your daily lives. I know you may be disappointed and dejected and anxious and afraid. Remember how I called to you from the lakeshore. Remember how you recognized me in the breaking of bread. Remember how I invited you into community. Know that I am with you, offering my comfort and encouragement and guidance and love – even when you feel lost and alone.

*Yes, all has changed...so follow me again and still.* We can't deny all that happened. Healing and compassion, love for our neighbors. Triumphant entries, frightening times of betrayal and denial. Feet washed and bread broken. Government and religious pageants aimed at dousing God's love. Horrific and painful death. Three days and a stone rolled away. Resurrection. Reports of being together again, despite the doubters. That now is done. God loves you. You have been redeemed. But that is not the end...

I need you now to follow again and still, to be my living body on earth, to share the good news. Come and have breakfast with me, for our work together has just begun.

One of the central claims of an Augsburg education, grounded in helping you find vocational meaning or hear your call, is how the various experiences of your life – growing up in a particular family, in a particular place; belonging to a particular religious community (or not); having a certain group of friends; coming to a particular college, where you study in a particular way a particular set of topics; choosing a particular career path, and so forth – how all of these experiences are part of a narrative that has history, that has an “arc” that has been influenced and shaped by the inter-dynamics of relationships and institutions and decisions that are all part of your vocational story. What I

believe we do at Augsburg is not to tell you what your vocation should be (though sometimes we all do need advice!), but to help you make sense of your vocational story, to find the coherence in the narrative, to see the significance of the various threads of your story as they weave a life for you in the world. To consider how you will live in the days after...because there will be many days after.

In this understanding of vocation, then, the Easter message about the days after becomes especially important because these are the days when we need to take responsibility for how our story continues to unfold, even when we are away from those advisors and teachers and friends who perhaps inspired us or motivated us or supported us down this path. As John's gospel concludes, God does not leave us alone in our vocational journeys in the mean time, Jesus is still inviting us to breakfast..

Wendell Berry, in his whimsical poem, "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front", offers us an insightful take on this message for life in the days after:

Love the quick profit, the annual raise,  
vacation with pay. Want more  
of everything ready-made. Be afraid  
to know your neighbors and to die.  
And you will have a window in your head.  
Not even your future will be a mystery  
any more. Your mind will be punched in a card  
and shut away in a little drawer.  
When they want you to buy something  
they will call you. When they want you  
to die for profit they will let you know

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.

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Go with your love to the fields.  
Lie down in the shade. Rest your head  
in her lap. Swear allegiance  
to what is highest in 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 necessary,  
some in the wrong direction.  
Practice resurrection.

What to do now? Come and have breakfast. Practice resurrection. Thanks be to God. Amen.

>>We send you forth<<

Here are two greetings that I brought to our graduates this spring – the first as part of our Multifaith Sending Ceremony and the second during our Baccalaureate Service.

### *Multifaith Sending Ceremony*

It is a wonderful privilege to be with all of you for this special sending ceremony – our graduates, your families and friends; our faculty, staff and Regents; and other members of the Augsburg community. This is a splendid time for all of us as we mark your great achievements and celebrate the mission-based work of Augsburg University. You, our graduates, are our epistles to the world, and we look forward with great anticipation to all of the ways in which your work, commitments, relationships and faith will make the world an even more fair, just and compassionate place for all creation.

We're especially proud of our Interfaith Scholars, who have worked on so many fronts to enhance our understanding of diverse faith perspectives, shape healthy attitudes across different faith traditions, and help forge relationships between people of various faith commitments. Their work in putting together this sending ceremony – especially in the midst of this pandemic year – is an example of how they are helping all of us to lift up our deep commitments to interfaith lives in this community.

I find inspiration for our interfaith work here at Augsburg in these beautiful words from the late Roman Catholic priest Henri Nouwen, who wrote:

Hospitality is the creation of free space where a stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer space where change can take place ....The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create emptiness, not a fearful emptiness, but a friendly emptiness where strangers can enter and find themselves free; free to sing their own songs, speak their own languages, dance their own dances; free to leave and follow their own vocations.

That sense of hospitality is at the heart of Augsburg's mission and vision – it is our deep belief that faith and learning and service are bound up together in the education we offer in this place - and as we send you forth from the college into the world and the various paths you will travel, we hope and pray that you will practice this same hospitality, this same commitment to linking faith, learning and service in your life and work, and thereby proudly tell the story of your college – Augsburg University – to the world.

Congratulations to all of you and blessings on your future journeys.

## *Baccalaureate Service*

*But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them.*

(Luke 24: 29)

It is a wonderful privilege to be with all of you for our 2021 Baccalaureate service, virtual as it must be – and we join with our graduates, your families and friends; our faculty, staff and Regents; and other members of the Augsburg community to mark your great achievements and celebrate the mission-based work of Augsburg University. You, our graduates, are our epistles to the world, and we look forward with great anticipation to all of the ways in which your work, commitments, relationships and faith will make God's world an even more fair, just and compassionate place for all God's creatures.

One of my favorite Biblical stories during this Easter season is the tale of Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Here, the Risen Christ meets with disciples traveling home to Emmaus and he teaches them of all that has happened in the days before – teaches them of betrayal, of denial, of death on a cross, and of resurrection – the story of our faith. As evening falls, Jesus says he will go on, but the disciples urge him to "stay with us." Stay with us, dear stranger, so that we might learn from you. Stay with us so that our eyes might be opened, our hearts set to burning – so that we might break bread together and know in you the Risen Christ. Stay with us.

And so in these, your closing days as students at Augsburg, these very special days – surrounded by these colleagues and teachers and friends and family who have meant so much to you, as you commence from Augsburg into the world – you are called by this community, by your education, by the stranger – to care for God's creation, to give away your minds and hearts, to live your faith in service to your neighbor – to heal the sick, to feed the hungry, to fight for justice. Stay with us, we pray, for wherever you go, whatever you do, we know this remarkable truth that God so loves the world, that God so loves you, and that we have been equipped with the gifts of faith and education so that we might join in God's good and faithful work in all the world. Thanks be to God.

## PRACTICE THIS

>>Honorary degrees<<

We give honorary degrees at our annual commencement ceremonies in order to lift up and celebrate individuals who we believe are role models for our students as they commence their lives in the world as Augsburg University graduates. These are not theoretical honors – they are meant to point to ways of being and living that have implications for how we might live as "informed citizens, thoughtful stewards, critical thinkers, and responsible leaders" – Augsburg's mission outcomes.

This year's honorary degree recipients are two of my heroes in the world – Eboo Patel, who founded and leads the Interfaith Youth Core, and Ira Harkavy, who founded and leads the Netter Center for Community Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania. Eboo has transformed college campuses with his compelling case for why we should care about interfaith lives in our pluralist society. Ira is the godfather of the modern anchor institution movement, of which Augsburg is a proud partner.

Here, in their own voices, are glimpses of what Patel and Harkavy challenge all of us to consider and practice.

**Eboo Patel, (excerpted from his 2007 Commencement Address, “The Faith Line: On Building the Cathedrals of Pluralism,” Augsburg College)**

“We pluralists far outnumber the totalitarians. What if we let ourselves imagine? What if we began building? What if every city block were a cathedral of pluralism; every university campus; every summer camp and day care. There would not be enough bombs in the world to destroy all of our cathedrals.

I believe each one of us is born with that cathedral inscribed in our soul. Our imaginations know its architecture intimately. Our hands recognize the cut of each stone. As J.M. Coatzee says, “All creatures come into the world bringing with them the memory of justice.” We Muslims call it being born in a state of fitrah, naturally inclining towards that which is good, because God gave us the gift of his ruh, of his breath.

It is from breath that we get life, and from breath that we get song, and the most beautiful thing we do in cathedrals is sing.

Earth is not always an easy place to imagine cathedrals, or to build them, or to fill them with song. There are times when you will feel like there is a conspiracy against your clarity; like the loneliness is freezing and the darkness is deep and the silence is unbreakable. Go back to your breath. Know its source. Know its purpose. Know that sometimes the order is upside down – that instead of going from imagination to building to song, you have to begin by singing.

And as you get accustomed to the sound of your own voice, you may discover that it is not alone. You may discover that a group of strangers has gathered, and they are humming, harmonizing, taking your lead, singing along. You may realize that the darkness has been broken by a soft glow. You may wonder where exactly you are. You may look around and see stained glass, you may look up and find yourself staring into the forever spire of a majestic cathedral.

And then you will know the truth of the words of the poet Li-Young Lee: “You must sing to be found; when found, you must sing.”

**Ira Harkavy, with John Puckett (excerpted from “Lessons from Hull House for the Contemporary Urban University,” *Social Science Review*, 68:3, September 1994)**

“Urban universities are now compelled to work with their neighbors for their own immediate and long-term self-interest. There are four reasons why universities should be involved in urban revitalization efforts. The first reason is institutional self-interest, including the safety, cleanliness, and attractiveness of the physical setting. Each of these contributes to the campus ambiance and to the recruitment and retention of faculty, students, and staff. Needless to say, high walls and imposing gates cannot shield students, faculty members, or administrators from the disturbing reality that surrounds the urban campus.

The second reason involves a more indirect effect on institutional self-interest. It includes both the costs (financial, public relations, and political) to the institution that result from a retreat from the community, as well as the benefits that accrue from active, effective engagement.

The third reason involves the advancement of knowledge, teaching, and human welfare through academically based community service focused on improving the quality of life in the local community. The benefits that can emerge from this approach are the integration of research, teaching, and service; the interaction of faculty members and graduate and undergraduate students from across the campus; the connection of projects involving participatory action research with student and staff volunteer activities; and the promotion of civic consciousness, value-oriented thinking, and a moral approach to issues of public concern among undergraduates.

Promoting civic consciousness, we believe, is the core component of the fourth reason for significant university involvement with the community. Sheldon Hackney has described this as the "institution's obligation to be a good citizen, and its pedagogic duty to provide models of responsible citizenship for its students." In other words, universities and colleges have, along with schools and religious institutions, a special responsibility to be moral institutions, exemplifying the highest civic and character-building values of society. At the heart of civic responsibility is the concept of neighborliness--caring about and assisting those living in close proximity to us. As an institution, a university's actions and inactions express morality; a university's indifference or civic engagement teaches lessons to its students and to society. This citizenship and character-building role, of course, was at the very center of the American college. However, the didactic approach to citizenship education and morality employed by its predecessors would today be both off-putting and at odds with the openness of the modern university."

## PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

I had the privilege to hear Paul Wadell and Charles Pinches – two academic colleagues with whom my path once crossed when they were grad students at Notre Dame and I was at Chicago – as they discussed their new book, *Living Vocationally: The Journey of the Called Life* (Cascade Books, 2021), a helpful guide to our vocational journeys based on their many years of teaching college students.

One of the most helpful teaching tools produced in recent years for those of us seeking to help our students explore their vocations in the world is Mark Schwehn and Dorothy Bass's *Leading Lives that Matter: What We Should Do and Who We Should Be*, first published in 2006 and now issued in a Second Edition (Eerdmans, 2020). The new edition includes many new selections that reflect more diverse voices and traditions. A remarkable gift that I highly recommend!

Colleague in philanthropic circles, Dr. Jim Lord, has long been a thought leader in imagining how we might bring a lens of abundance to our lives and work in the world marked by scarcity thinking. His recent *Bounce Back Higher: 3 Steps that Inspire the Spirit of Contribution in the Age of the Pandemic* (Serving Society, 2021) is another important word from Jim that reminds us of all we have accomplished and how those accomplishments can motivate our work ahead.



>>An anniversary poem<<

This week marks a significant anniversary for my wife and me – 25 years! – and I’m mindful of how much our lives together are often focused on children and colleges and communities rather than on our kindred spirits. Here is a reminder from Billy Collins.

*Carry*

I want to carry you  
and for you to carry me  
the way voices are said to carry over water.

Just this morning on the shore,  
I could hear two people talking quietly  
in a rowboat on the far side of the lake.

They were talking about fishing,  
then one changed the subject,  
and, I swear, they began talking about you.

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>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

- Trusting institutions - again
- Stories we tell to ourselves and each other
- Big ideas!
- How the gifts of our faith helped us navigate the pandemic!

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