

## NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Volume Twenty-One, Number Two (December 2019)

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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<<

Happy New Year to my many friends and colleagues for whom reflective practice is a calling. I wish you all warm wishes for 2020, when reflective practice may be more essential than ever before.

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

>>Turning the tables<<

I preached this homily during the first week of Advent in the Augsburg Chapel.

Scripture: Matthew 21: 12-13

I'm reflecting again on "why vocation?" – the question I posed at the beginning of the semester – and I'm finding in these early days of Advent scriptural reminders of how Jesus calls us to listen with courage and openness to paths unimagined for our lives of faith in the world.

Here on the cusp of the new Christian liturgical year, in the season we call Advent, I am reminded of all the various new years we commemorate in our personal and social lives.

There are, of course, birthdays and anniversaries of various sorts for each of us. And then there is the calendar new year, where we put an old year behind us and resolve to be better in the days ahead. Here at Augsburg, we mark out new academic years with all the promise and excitement we feel as our community is extended with new students and we all get a fresh start with our various courses of study. And finally, for those of us who must worry about such things, there is a new fiscal year – which here at Augsburg begins each June 1<sup>st</sup> – a day when I like to exclaim that all sins are forgiven from the previous budget.

But what about the new liturgical year? If you were in church on Sunday or here in chapel these past couple of days, I think you have a sense that the advent season begins in a dark place, full of mourning and anguish and longing. The epistle lesson assigned for Sunday – from Paul's letter to

the Romans – said something about putting off all licentiousness and debauchery – the reader at our church had a hard time even saying the words!

And then there is this gospel text for this morning. Jesus enters the holy temple, only to turn violent, overturning the tables of moneychangers and the seats of those who sold doves, decrying the ways in which the temple – his Father’s house – had become a den of thieves and not a house of prayer. And in so doing, Jesus upsets the entire economy that has emerged within the temple walls, calling into question the means by which sacrifices are made to pay homage and to atone for sins. Jesus turns the tables, quite literally, and therein it seems to me is the central message of the Advent season, of this new year – Jesus calls us to be transformed of the world’s ways, to turn away from business as usual, and to live as those who already know the end of the story.

And that, of course, is what makes this annual new year commemoration for God’s faithful people so very different than our usual practices – this is a new year in which we have nothing to do except to live as those already redeemed. We have seen the Christ Child, the teacher, the healer, the Savior – we have known the manger, the masses gathered to hear God’s word, the blind man made to see, the cross, the empty tomb, the road to Emmaus – we have experienced God breaking into our history for the world God loves so much. And now we have the reminder and challenge – the renewed call – to live as those who have nothing to prove, nothing to earn, nothing to resolve, except to follow, to be God’s faithful people in the world, to be transformed so that we might be agents of God’s transformation and love for all of creation, to turn the tables on the world so that it might know the compassion and mercy and justice that is ours through our awesome God.

Now, I’m not in a position to say exactly what this transformation looks like for each of us. I suppose a little less licentiousness and debauchery, but beyond that, as Martin Luther taught us, our relationship with God is personal and the call we receive will take us down paths we cannot imagine. This Advent season might be a most appropriate time for you to listen and watch even more carefully for what God is calling you to be and do in the world. The light from the Advent wreath, signifying the love of God breaking into the darkness, may be just the place to start. Where are the light and the darkness in your life, and where is the light leading you? Where are the wellsprings of compassion and hope in your life, and how can you follow God’s light even further into those places, turning the tables on the darkness that is so nearby? Longing for transformation, where might we find that peace and justice and love that passes all human understanding?

What I am able to say is that God does not leave us alone or comfortless or without what we need for our vocational journeys, and one of the remarkable ways we know God’s guiding hand is in the embrace of communities and institutions that have themselves been formed and transformed by God’s saving love in Jesus Christ – communities and institutions like Augsburg University.

Our founders believed deeply that this college was meant to embody the Word made flesh – that is the reason why they chose John 1: 14 as our founding motto – “And the Word became flesh and lived among us.” Augsburg is an incarnational community, grounded in this place, attentive to the needs of the world, and called to equip our students with the education and skills they need to “turn the tables” on the world.

A few ways we live out that calling and help our students to “turn the tables”:

First, we educate “off the main road.” I first coined this way of describing our approach to education after a visit to our campus in Windhoek, Namibia. As you come into Windhoek on the

fancy highway, you see what the local tourism council wants you to see – new and well-kept buildings, few signs of struggle or poverty, industrious business and business people. But just a few blocks off the main road, you get a different view – a view of vast tin villages, comprising thousands who have sought relief from meager existences in rural settings and have come to the city to find work, only to find a squalid life. A view of clinics and orphanages and other agencies struggling to meet the needs of too many with too little. A view of systematic racism, keeping people in their places according to the hierarchy of power based on the color of one’s skin.

And it is in these places off the main road that we are called to be educated, to see Christ’s face, and to be God’s people fighting for wholeness and justice. I would argue that Augsburg’s academic mission – and all of its programs – is all about education off the main road, here in Cedar-Riverside and Phillips and wherever we are found. In the classroom, in the neighborhood, around the world, we believe that God calls us to those places where the tables must be turned, and where our faithful work is most needed. In the texts we read, the conversations we engage, the service we offer, the communities we help build and sustain, God calls us off the main road so that God’s people might know God’s redeeming grace.

Second, here at Augsburg we are a community that believes that hospitality is not enough and that we are called to the work of justice and compassion for all God’s people. Professor Lori Hale from the Religion department offered this phrase “hospitality is not enough” in a chapel homily a few years back and it has haunted me ever since. It haunts me because it can be easy to comfort ourselves with the ways of hospitality – our expanding diversity as a college community, our commitments to being of service to our neighbors, our values as a place of welcome – these become excuses sometimes for not addressing the underlying reasons why hospitality is needed in the world. Strangers need to be welcomed because they have been excluded. Neighbors need our help because they have been discriminated against. The vulnerable long for justice because they have been marginalized.

But turning the tables means that hospitality is not enough – it is, in fact, just a beginning as we must fight for justice and safety and health and compassion and wholeness for all God’s people. We must use our intellects and minds to name and understand injustice and violence in the world. We must use our hearts and spirits to accompany those whose journeys are disrupted by injustice and violence. And we must use our feet and hands to stand with and fight alongside those who suffer from injustice and violence. God calls us to turn the tables on the world and to embrace the work of both hospitality and justice – of breaking bread together so that we might know and share God’s love and justice for all people.

Finally and simply, we are a community that is committed to the deep links between faith and learning. Our Lutheran heritage teaches us that faith and learning belong together, and we give away that gift each and every day to all of our students whether they share our particular faith or not. We should not take this gift for granted. Faith without learning is naïve, and learning without faith is foolish. Whether in the classroom, the residence halls, here in this sacred space, on athletic fields, or wherever our teaching and learning community gathers, we are called to explore and share our faith so that our learning might be redeemed. In this Advent season, this particularly Christian liturgical time, it seems most fitting that we lift up all of the ways in which God is present in our lives, reflecting our diverse experiences and faith traditions, informing our learning together, so that we might all know the call to “turn the tables,” to be the light in the darkness, to be God’s people and do God’s holy work, and thereby to live as those transformed. Thanks be to God. Amen.

>>To see things whole and heal the world<<

The following homily was first offered at a national gathering of the Seeing Things Whole network more than a decade ago. I have returned to its themes as part of our efforts at Augsburg to rethink our business and leadership programs. See below for more information about Seeing Things Whole, which is now based at Augsburg.

Scripture: Ephesians 1: 15-23, Matthew 25: 31-46

*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.*

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

Here we are on this final Sunday of the Christian liturgical year – next week we begin again with the preparations of Advent – and as we conclude the liturgical calendar, we celebrate Christ the King Sunday, a day pregnant with the possibility of triumphalist proclamations.

And here we are at the conclusion of this gathering of those who find in the Seeing Things Whole movement a way of understanding our lives together in institutions and communities that seeks to piece together out of our brokenness a way of seeing and living that points us to wholeness.

And here we are with the gift of the gospel for this morning which calls us to account with the great shepherd – to an account that, whether we are sheep or goats, reveals the fact that we have missed the point.

The parable of the sheep and the goats illustrates the tension that the author of Matthew's gospel was addressing in the life of the early faithful. The Romans had destroyed the temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD. The Second Coming had not yet happened. What were these good and faithful people to do? Matthew writes in the familiar language of his time to describe a heavenly scene when the Son of Man would come in judgment, separating the sheep from the goats, just as shepherds would do as dusk came to their fields. The important theological distinction here – the distinction that helps the early faithful to make sense of their lives in the world – is that Christ already has accomplished their redemption and now they are called to live not as those awaiting an imminent return but as those who are called to recognize God in the neighbor, in the world, in their continuing lives together.

The apostle Paul writes in a similar vein to the community at Ephesus when he proclaims that God has put all things under Christ's feet and made him the head over all things. Here is Christ the King, Christ crucified and resurrected, that makes possible the abiding life of God's faithful people in the world – people like the Ephesians who Paul commends for their faith and love and hope – people like us who have been redeemed so that we might be God's people and do God's work. Thanks be to God.

So, what to do? Here, the clear messages of this feast day are particularly meaningful for our gathering and work together.

First, we confess that all has been accomplished through the death and resurrection of Christ, and thereby we affirm that we live in the meantime, both saved and sinner (as Luther teaches us), our ways of seeing the world are incomplete and fragmented. Only God sees things whole. Ours is an ongoing vocational journey to do God's work, accepting that we cannot, on our own, know enough about what God intends. We are called to humility. We are called to live as those who need each other, who need a multitude of voices and perspectives, who need to accept that we will never be finished with our explorations and questioning of what God wills for God's people. We will make mistakes. We will ask new questions. We will use the gifts God has given us to seek to do God's will. We see through a glass darkly, the apostle Paul reminds us in his letter to the Corinthians, but then we shall see face to face. What a day that will be!

For now, though, we do well to listen to perhaps the greatest prophet of 20<sup>th</sup> century Christian realism, Reinhold Niebuhr, who wrote in his *The Irony of American History* (1952) these words that summarize how we might live in this paradoxical time – how hope can be found and pursued, how faith creates trust and leads us to grasp the love of the Creator, how we can seek to see things whole even when we know we will never be finished: “Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime; therefore we are saved by hope. Nothing true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we are saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore, we are saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as from our own; therefore we are saved by the final form of love, which is forgiveness.”

The second lesson for the day is made abundantly clear in the words of the king in Matthew's gospel: “For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me; I was naked and you gave me clothing; I was sick and you took care of me; I was in prison and you visited me.” Those who have been redeemed, those who believe that all has been accomplished through Christ, those who live in the meantime, are called to be vigilant to where Christ is in our midst and to what Christ requires of us. We are called to heal the world. We are called to be what Luther called “little Christs” as we serve our neighbors no matter what...

Here, we have a helpful teacher in the German Lutheran theologian and pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who joined the resistance against the Nazis during World War II and who was executed for his role in attempts to assassinate Hitler. Bonhoeffer wrote letters from prison during his final days to his friend, Eberhard Bethge. On July 21, 1944, Bonhoeffer wrote these striking words: “...it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to have faith...By this-worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world—watching with Christ in Gethsemane. That, I think, is faith; ...that is how one becomes a human and a Christian.”

We are called to see things whole and to heal the world. All has been accomplished and now we are here, in the world, the only body of Christ on earth now (as Teresa of Avila once wrote). “Nothing is as whole as a heart that has been broken.” What a remarkable gift, what an awesome obligation. May God grant us the wisdom and strength to be God's faithful people in the world. Amen.

PRACTICE THIS

>>Seeing Things Whole<<

The following is an overview of “Seeing Things Whole—A Threefold Model of Organizational Life”, which is based at Augsburg. You can learn more at our website: [www.augsburg.edu/seeingthingswhole](http://www.augsburg.edu/seeingthingswhole).

*What is Seeing Things Whole?*

Seeing Things Whole is a community of organization leaders, scholars and educators dedicated to exploring the intersection of values, organizational life and performance. Its work is guided by a vision of a world in which the performance of organizations is measured no longer on the basis of a single bottom line, but rather on multiple bottom lines, which together more fully reflect the health and impact of the organization on the world around it.

*Who does Seeing Things Whole serve?*

One helpful way of representing organizational life is as a relationship of three dimensions—the dimensions of *Identity*, *Purpose* and *Stewardship*. Each dimension consists of a cluster of the people and groups who have a particular stake in how they live this aspect of their lives, their core values, and the ways they take initiative and exercise power. Moreover, each of these dimensions has its own unique set of preoccupations, along with a field of influence within which these preoccupations seem to dominate.

*How does Seeing Things Whole function?*

Through its action research, Seeing Things Whole (STW) has created useful tools that provide measurements and assistance for organizations that recognize that sustainable success requires more than simply turning a profit. For example, STW’s Threefold Model for Organizational Life helps organizations become more intentional about balancing three dimensions of their organization’s life: Identity (striving for maximum potential in accordance with core values), Purpose (providing quality products or services that meet society’s needs), and Stewardship (effective and efficient use of human, material, and financial resources).

*Why does Seeing Things Whole exist?*

There are predictable and legitimate tensions among these three dimensions and, at times, these tensions can operate destructively within the life of the organization. Clearly they form part of the dynamism of organizational life.

A challenge in organizational life, indeed within all of life, is to see things whole. In a healthy organization, these three dimensions function not as separate fiefdoms, but as a commonwealth of collaborative service.

In a larger sense, however, seeing things whole means more than simply integrating the existing self-interests of each of these areas solely for the betterment of the organization or the personal benefit of its stakeholders. Rather, a commitment to see things whole invites us to regard the entire organization within the broader context of the needs of the world around it. From such a perspective, the work of seeing things whole compels us to strain to understand what it means for any given organization to move in ways that reflect a disciplined mindfulness of its relationship to this larger world which itself is groaning towards wholeness.

*Why Augsburg University?*

Seeing Things Whole (STW), throughout its existence, has been dedicated to the holistic formation of leaders, leadership teams and entire organizations. Augsburg College has been committed to pedagogy of educating students to think and act holistically, with a vision of being recognized as a premier place for leadership formation. The addition of STW's processes and resources to Augsburg's extensive resources further strengthens Augsburg's capability of forming students who will be able to "see things whole". This collaboration is also expected to significantly expand the geographical reach of STW's work and learning to new markets and venues.

## PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

I'm getting ready to offer my "Place Matters" course to senior Augsburg students and I have a couple of new resources to share with them.

First, the National Geographic Society magazine for April 2019 dedicates an entire issue on how to design (and redesign) cities to support health, sustainability and community.

Second, University of Chicago professor Emily Talen has published *Neighborhood* (Oxford University Press, 2018), an interdisciplinary exploration of what constitutes a neighborhood beyond its geographic boundaries.

On another relevant topic, *Plough Quarterly* (the quarterly journal of the Bruderhof community), in its Autumn 2019 issue, addresses "Vocation: Why We Work" with insightful articles by Will Willimon and Mike Rowe. For information, visit [www.plough.com](http://www.plough.com).

Finally, on issues critical to our times, Jedediah Purdy has penned *This Land is Our Land: The Struggle for a New Commonwealth* (Princeton University Press, 2019).

>>Descends the Light of lights<<

Each year, Augsburg celebrates the Advent season with an astonishing liturgy of word and music known as Advent Vespers. This year – Augsburg's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary – was the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Advent Vespers, which is held in the soaring sanctuary of Central Lutheran Church in downtown Minneapolis. This year's theme, "Light for the World to See", was illustrated with beautiful choral and orchestral music and curated readings, including this beautiful poem written by Augsburg's campus pastor Justin Lind-Ayres.

*Descends the Light of lights*

*Into this hushed world*

*gripped by ceaseless longing,*

*Breath by labored breath,*

*a room-less place makes space*

*for the squinted scream of earth's salvation.*

*Ranked seraphs wing to field and flock*

*their heavenly bodies  
erupting with star-sent radiance  
mirrored in the visage of vagabonds.  
Glorias crack the night  
disclosing to muted mortal flesh what the manger knows.  
Scrunched brown skin stretching around the Word full  
of fragile grace  
naked truth.*

*Such tender love no darkness can grasp.*

*The after-birth of this infant Advent  
now incarnated in our becoming.*

*We are  
stewards of mercy  
lovers of justice  
servants of neighbor  
makers of peace  
citizens of joy  
beacons of light  
called  
children of God.*

>>Subscription information<<

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>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

- Sesquicentennials and thinking institutionally



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

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