

## CREDO

Augsburg College Chapel

September 7, 2006

Matthew 16: 13-19

- There is this wonderful moment in the Mass, when the cantor's voice declares *Credo in unum Deum* – a bold proclamation of faith that rings out in the sanctuary to lead the congregation into its profession of the creed – today I come before you with the same invitation – as we begin our academic year here at Augsburg, I call you to proclaim your faith, individually and as a college community! It is where the work of education begins...
- Who do you say that I am? Our gospel for this morning invites all of us to a proclamation of our credo, our faith. And as is so often the case in the Christian scriptures, the disciples offer all of us a glimpse of the range of human responses to the work of God in our midst
- The first response to the question is to offer a summary of what other people believe – here is what others say...how often we find ourselves doing the same thing – let me show you what the research tells us about this question (read a few doctoral dissertations!) – I dare not take a personal stand – but that response is not good enough for Jesus – But who do you say that I am?
- The second response is more firm – at least for Peter – who declares his belief that Jesus is the son of the living God – good answer, except that a few chapters later it is Peter who is betraying his faith when questioned by bystanders in the midst of a crisis...(in Matthew 26)
- And then we have Jesus' wise words and promise to Peter – there is something remarkable here, this proclamation of faith, and on this rock I shall build my kingdom on earth...so how is that going?
- Well, we could say that Jesus was naïve in entrusting his kingdom to a mortal whose faith he knew would waver – or we could embrace the wisdom that it begins here with a bold proclamation of faith and then it proceeds, through the grace of God, in myriad paths of blessing and deceit and disorder and joy – with glimpses of salvation suddenly gone because of human foibles
- Jesus is clear – you begin here with an answer to the question of what you believe – the way of discipleship is grounded in the leap of faith, the credo, and from there the adventure of life is launched – to be met with all sorts of detours and disappointments but also with all fashion of forgiveness and grace and wonder
- Why is a credo important at the beginning of our academic year here in this college? Like the disciples, we too often fall back on the opinions of others, we are afraid to take stands for fear that we will be wrong or hurt or worse. And like Peter, even when we take a stand and declare our credo, we mess up and betray the faith we declare
- But the wonder of college – at least a college like ours, grounded in a faith community and willing to place faith and values at the heart of its work – is that we are able and expected to state our beliefs with conviction and then to go forward

together, knowing that those beliefs must be tested by experience, by relationships, by conversations, by time, by education in the broadest sense...this is the core work of our college

- Our Lutheran heritage confirms this relationship between faith and learning – we believe but we also know that our faith is not complete – we are fallible, we are human, we are sinful – Lord, I believe, help my unbelief – and that is why we gather here as a community – in this chapel, in this college, in this city, in the midst of God’s creation – to share our faiths and to know that our work as a college is to question, to educate, to strengthen, to test, to embrace, to connect our faith with our learning
- I want to know what you believe – I want to learn from your beliefs even as you learn from mine – our conversations as a community about what we believe are at the heart of our common life, they are a critical part of the educational enterprise, and they are a central aspect of a healthy democracy – this isn’t about evangelism, this is about the sort of public discourse that reflects the richness of our lives together in society – and our faith is clearly part of that rich fabric of human experience and community
- Stephen Carter, a Yale law professor, has written with great wisdom on the need to have conversations about our faith a central part of public discourse – for Carter, this is an important part of the “etiquette of democracy,” a willingness to be persuaded that we can learn from others. Without such public conversations about what we believe, what we value, what we care about, we are left to closely-held opinions and to the sort of polarization about faith and values that characterizes life in our country right now. We won’t necessarily agree – but we owe it to each other to come to what my teacher Martin Marty has called the “great, republican banquet table,” where a seat is waiting for us, the conversation is lively, and we enjoy the company.
- National Public Radio has reestablished a wonderful series entitled “This I Believe”, for which they invite all sorts of folks to write and read essays about their faith – I could preach a sermon on each of my belief statements, but here they are in summary fashion...
  - I believe in a generous and gracious God whose love for us is beyond understanding but demands of me diligent and vigilant life in the world
  - I believe in the power of forgiveness and the gift of reconciliation
  - I believe in democracy, the miracle of abundant life together with strangers
  - I believe in each of you and the promise of your work here together – the nexus between your personal gifts and calls and the mission and vocation of Augsburg College – the wonders and grace of learning
  - I believe in the blessings of the ordinary – in glimpses of salvation – they may be all we have some days, but they give us meaning and hope (quirky poem makes my point...)

["Blessings" by Ronald Wallace from *Long for This World: New and Selected Poems*. © University of Pittsburgh Press.]

## **Blessings**

occur.  
Some days I find myself  
putting my foot in  
the same stream twice;  
leading a horse to water  
and making him drink.  
I have a clue.  
I can see the forest  
for the trees.

All around me people  
are making silk purses  
out of sows' ears,  
getting blood from turnips,  
building Rome in a day.  
There's a business  
like show business.  
There's something new  
under the sun.

Some days misery  
no longer loves company;  
it puts itself out of its.  
There's rest for the weary.  
There's turning back.  
There are guarantees.  
I can be serious.  
I can mean that.  
You can quite  
put your finger on it.

- Who do you say that I am? Jesus asks his disciples. It is the question we all must answer again and again – it is the question of faith and it is where we begin, where we are grounded, where we draw our sustenance – and what better place to ask it than here at Augsburg College, in this community of learning and faith! Credo, credo, credo. Thanks be to God.