

Augustana College
Chapel of Reconciliation

Working Towards Salvation

Ann Pederson

3 March 2004

“Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for God’s good pleasure.” *Philippians 2:12-13*. Why would a Lutheran preach on a text that seems to smell of works righteousness? Well, first of all, her Calvinist friend asked her to. Second, it’s a great text for Lent. Third, it’s a superb interpretation of justification by grace through faith alone. However, the only way to interpret these two verses about working out our salvation is in light of the previous verses, a hymn sung by the early church, and quoted by St. Paul. Listen:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though, he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This hymn shapes the following three interpretations of how we “work out our salvation in fear and trembling.”

Interpretation #1

In Toni Cade Bambara’s novel, *the Saltaters*, the question, “Are you sure, sweetheart, that you want to be well?” is put by Minnie Ransom, the fabled healer and swamp-hag, to Velma Henry, a young woman who has just attempted suicide. Minnie continues, “Take away the miseries, and you take away some folk’s reason for living. Their conversation piece anyway. . . got to give it all up, the pain, the hurt, the anger, and make room for lovely things to rush in and fill you full. . . “ Velma must now decide whether she is ready to dump her despair and let the lovely things rush in and fill her full. Instead of asking, is life really that bad? Velma must ask, Can life really be good? The joy of being well is a commitment to and affirmation of the risks, intimacies, and adventures that life brings.

Interpretation #2

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is on his way to the house of Jairus when a woman with a hemorrhage makes her way through the crowd to touch his garment, hoping to be healed. Jesus speaks to her: “Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your disease.” Trusting the promise of life in Christ will be kept, the woman lets the lovely things rush in as Jesus proclaims to her: “*your* faith has made you well.” *Your faith.*

Interpretation #3: When you get up in the morning, look in the mirror, are you sure you please God?

Luther writes that we are “pleasing to God” on account of Christ. God finds pleasure in us and who we are and what we do. *Sola fide* accentuates both the divine grace and human participation. Luther: “Now those who Glory in God are those who know for sure that God looks on them with favour and deigns to regard them kindly, so that what one does is pleasing in God’s sight, and what does not please God is borne with and pardoned.”

Final commentary:

Faith is connected in *The Salteters*, *The Gospel of Mark*, and in Luther with words like joy, delight, pleasure, wholeness, peace, wellness. Having faith means trusting that lovely things will rush in and fill us full. Faith is trusting that is the very way WE appropriate our faith—our autobiographical appropriation so to speak—delights God on account of Christ. Faith then is trusting that we please God on account of our faith, but only on account of the object of our faith, Jesus Christ.

However, remember the kenotic hymn from Philippians 2—“*he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.*” And “*he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.*” A twist. The benefits and pleasure of faith, however, always come in the shape of and in relation to Christ—that is, on behalf of serving the neighbor. Luther says: “*God does not work in us without us; for He created and preserves us for this very purpose, that He might work in us and we might cooperate with Him, whether that occurs outside His Kingdom, by His general omnipotence, or within His kingdom, by the special power of the Holy Spirit. . . Thus he preaches, shows mercy to the poor, and comforts the afflicted by means of us.*” God delights in us and finds pleasure when those who those who are oppressed and miserable, the desperate and the damned, are lifted and made whole by our love and compassion.

We work out our salvation, in cooperation with God, in order to enter into the flesh of others and bear others burdens.

HOLY COMMUNION
Wednesday, March 3, 2004

Prelude “My Song is Love Unknown” Ralph Vaughn Williams

Welcome/Announcements

Invocation

Confession/Absolution WOV p. 10, right hand column

KyrieWOV #602

Scripture Philippians 2: 12-14

Sermon “Working Towards Salvation” Ann Pederson

Hymn “O God Beyond All Praising” WOV #797

Eucharistic Prayer

Distribution

Blessing & Benediction

Postlude “In the Cross of Christ I Glory” Austin Lovelace

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

JAMES HERSCH, performing musician, songwriter and educator, will be on campus March 5-7. There will be a seminar in the chapel on **Fri., Mar. 5th at 4 pm**. The seminar will consist of James using his musical talents to teach students and staff a new way of reaching their local community by giving of themselves. Pizza will be provided! Sign-up at the Commons Desk (4413). **Deadline is 3/3/04**. There will also be a concert in the Back Alley on Sat., Mar. 5 - 9 pm. Admission is free with Augie ID.

CHAPEL SCHEDULE

WEDNESDAY CIA - 9 pm

FRIDAY Worship, 10 am - Jackie Hingst, Senior Speaker
“Bible, Bagels & Buddies” - 5:30 pm - Chapel
(CIA sponsored)

SUNDAY Worship, 11 am - Pr. Paul