

Augustana College
Chapel of Reconciliation

Sitting at the Table, Dining with the Word

Dialog

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"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God--children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-5, 10-14).

"In the beginning was the Word . . ." Music to the ears of one who makes her living on and loves the sound of words. "In the beginning was the Word." John tells us that the Word (with a capital "W") has the properties of light: the ability to illuminate, permeate, even dispel the darkness. What tremendous power to illuminate the darkness that lies behind closed eyes and stopped up ears. What power there is to permeate the cold darkness of our hearts and dispel the shadows in our minds.

This is, I believe, what great literature seeks to do as well. The word (lower case "w") at its most powerful sheds light on the darkness in the world. Whether a piercing beacon or a glowing candle, the power of the word is to open our eyes to that to which we may be blind, to unstop our ears to the cries in the night, to melt our hearts to the cold loneliness of another's life, to open our minds to the light of truth--or at least, to a truth. For where there is light, there is understanding; where there is understanding there is compassion; and where there is compassion there is grace--and truth.

In her novel *River, Cross My Heart*, Breena Clarke writes, "Folks always say, 'You come in this world alone, and you must leave it alone.' They ought to know better. Because it isn't so. It's not that way at all. The child comes to life very much attached and stays attached and is mired all its life in a soup of relations. This child struggles to be born. It comes out pushing and pulling with the cord attached and still holding on way up. The child has to pull and push and make a place for itself in and among all the people that are already here" (75).

The Gospel writer tells us that the Word was born into a world that did not receive him, did not even recognize him. It would seem then that this Jesus came into the world alone. And yet, he came, not merely to observe, not solely to walk around and take in this world vicariously; this Jesus, the Word, came to "dwell among us," to be one of us, to be "mired . . . in a soup of relations" to create a family of God. Jesus, the alpha and omega, the first word and the last word, sheds grace on the disenfranchised--in fact, becomes one of the outcast. This Jesus "make[s] a place for [Him]self in and among all the people [who] are already here": people like you and me, people unlike you and me, people like all of us who suffer and sin and live in the dark. God takes on the flesh of sin and suffering, the flesh of darkness, to lead us into the light.

Similarly, literature takes on our flesh too. How many times, for example, have you recognized yourself in the face of a literary character? More than likely--and uncannily--this mirror image is the image not of one who looks and thinks and acts like you but of one who is unlike you in every way except that, like all of us, he or she dwells in darkness. This is, then, how literature allows us to "make our

dwelling among” the Other. This is how, then, we are able to take on the flesh of another--or to put our own skin on the Other. And in this sharing of skin--this camaraderie of experience--the words of an author can lead us to the light of grace and truth. The words beckon us into the family of humanity; the words call us home.

Home—it is a word that for me conjures up luxuries that Granskou Hall will never quite master. It is something personal and special. A home is where each one of us truly hangs our hats. We come home, be it to a dorm room or something more conventional, to share the stories of the day. A home is an extension of each one of us—because I believe at the end of the day it’s where we most long to be. Even on vacation—be it big or small, by the end of the trip our dreams are no longer of palm trees and waterfalls but of the comforts of the home we left behind like the favorite pillow and the funny taste of the water from the kitchen sink.

As a guest, entering a home is a bit overwhelming. I find myself entering a space that is intimate only to those who live in it. The house has no personal meaning to me. Though I am guest, I feel like an outsider who doesn’t belong. The funny thing is—I desire to fit in, to find my place in the house and so I analyze the hangings on the wall. I scrutinize the pictures on the mantel. I judge the placement of the knick knacks on the shelf and I notice how the hand towels are hung in the bathroom.

Why is it that I behave this way? What is it that I am searching for?

I believe I am searching for a story--- for meaning-- in this foreign house. My surveying analysis of the house ceases as I am seated at the dining room table. I am seated among those that call this house: home. I am no longer a guest, I am member of the family. And I soon forget about the weird flag hanging in the corner of the house and am focused on the family that inhabits this home and the stories that they have to tell.

Matthew 9:9-13

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth. “Follow me,” he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and “sinners” came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?” On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Jesus is focused on the tax collectors and sinners when he eats with Matthew at Matthew’s house. Jesus says he has not come to call the righteous, but sinners. Jesus does not call these people from a distance—he calls them and then dines at THEIR table. He becomes part of their family—he is not a guest, he is one among them.

Literature allows us to do the same thing. Literature calls us to the door and invites us in. It sits us down and tells us a story. It brings us deep within the walls of homes we’d perhaps rather not see and then leaves us to decipher the pictures hanging on the other side.

In her short story Revelation, Flannery O’Connor begins by describing the room in which the story takes place. She writes, “The doctor’s waiting room, which was very small, was almost full when the Turpins entered and Mrs. Turpin, who was very large, made it look even smaller by her presence. She stood looming at the head of the magazine table set in the center of it, a living demonstration that the room was inadequate and ridiculous. Her little bright black eyes took in all the patients as she sized up the seating situation. There was one vacant chair and a place on a sofa occupied by a blond child in a dirty blue

romper who should have been told to move over and make room for the lady. He was five or six, but Mrs. Turpin saw at once that no one was going to tell him to move over. He was slumped down in the seat, his arms idle at his sides and his eyes idle in his head; his nose ran unchecked...Mrs. Turpin remained standing. The only man in the room besides Claud was a lean stringy old fellow with a rusty hand spread out on each knee, whose eyes were closed as if he were asleep or dead or pretending to be so as not to get up and offer her his seat. Her gaze settled agreeably on a well-dressed grey-haired lady whose eyes met hers and whose expression said: if that child belonged to me, he would have some manners and move over – there's plenty of room there for him and you too" (416-417).

Literature makes room for all of us. It allows us to dine with sinners and noble characters alike and then challenges us much like the gospel, to find a greater good within it all that can be applied to our lives once we get up from the dining room table.

In the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Zora Neale Hurston tells the story of a black woman in the early part of the 20th century who gets up from her dining room table to go in search of life, to immerse herself in a soup of relations, and ultimately to discover who she is in relationship to God. Her journey leads her to the discovery of this truth: " 'You got tuh go there tuh know there.' " This is the truth of literature, the experience of going there--anywhere--and then coming to know. Literature takes us to places we might otherwise not travel: the post Civil War south, the mind of a mad man, the home of a dysfunctional family, the bedside of a dying woman, to the streets of London, to India, to Iraq. Through the words on the page, we are invited to leave the comfort of our own table and dine with humanity, and in so doing, we can begin to live out the call of our Savior: to go and to know, to love our neighbor. For this, too, is the truth of the Gospel, that God sent His Son to go *here* to know here. Jesus came in Word and flesh to sit at our table and lead us home.

MORNING WORSHIP
Monday - January 24, 2005

Prelude "Light of the World" Cathy Pino
Welcome/Announcements

Invocation

Call to Worship

L: God, we pray for the light of truth
C: Open us to the gift of learning
L: God, we pray for the light of your word
C: Open us to learn of you
L: God, we pray for the light of love
C: Open us to gratitude for all we learn.

Hymn "Go Light Your World" Congregation sings chorus
So, carry your candle, run to the darkness, Choros Dancers
seek out the hopeless, confused and torn.
Hold out your candle for all to see it.
Take your candle and go light your world.
Take your candle and go light your world.

Prayer Resound

Scripture John 1:1-5, 10-14
Matthew 9:9-13

Dialog English - Beth Boyens, Angie Lucas

Hymn "Word of God, Come Down on Earth" WOV 716, vs. 1,3

Prayers
Lord's Prayer
Benediction
Dismissal

Hymn "We Are Marching in the Light of God" Wov 650
(verses will be marching, dancing)

Postlude "We Are Marching; in the Light of God"
Robert Buckley Farlee

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVICE LEARNING - Registration is now open for the spring **Service Learning** trips to Holden Village (Chelan, WA) and Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. These are wonderful opportunities to learn about and serve our neighbors. Space is limited so please sign up soon. Questions - call the chapel office.

WANT TO JOIN OUTREACH? Are you looking for a new activity for spring semester? It is not too late to join an Outreach team! Outreach is a ministry of the Augie chapel. Teams of students reach out to congregations in South Dakota, Iowa, Minnesota and Nebraska. They lead worship services, bring youth programming or share liturgical dance. In Outreach, you can live out your faith by serving others, while building close friendships with your team and having fun. Team members have a once weekly meeting, with one outing a month. Contact the chapel at 274-5403 to sign up! Registration forms (available on the Narthex table) are due Friday, Feb. 11!

BREAD DAYS is coming up soon, Feb.7 and 8. It is a great experience in getting to know your state government and getting together with other concerned people. Many of the church groups are co-sponsors, including the Association of Christian Churches of South Dakota, which includes about nine denominations, probably yours. Rev. Jeff Eisele will lead the Bible Study. Bread for the World staffer, Tammy Walhof, will speak about hunger in America. Questions...email Nancy Olson at S10AndyW@aol.com

GETAWAY weekend is now taking registrations. The Getaway is a weekend retreat on Feb.18-20. Questions - Molly Rothwell...4964. Scholarships are available to early registrants. Cost is \$45 if submitted by Jan. 27th.

CAMP FAIR - Feb. 9th - Student Street. Many camps will be represented so please stop by if you want to explore the experience of working at a camp for the summer.

CHAPEL CALENDAR

Tuesday	Network Prayer, 10 am
Wednesday	Holy Communion, 10 am - Traveling Mercies Blessing
Friday	Worship, 10 am - Allison Fornander, Senior Spkr.