

Augustana College
Chapel of Reconciliation

Accompany Me

Cari Skogberg

November 24, 2003

Luke 24: 13-35

There are few joys in life as rewarding as a well-executed performance. For musicians in particular, almost nothing compares to the ecstasy of evoking pure, reverberating tones with brilliant clarity in a difficult piece of music. Those are the performances that cause members of the audience to involuntarily lean forward in their chairs so as not to miss a single sound. It is pure beauty.

And that was exactly the kind of performance I was anticipating when I sat down one Sunday to play the French Horn for special music in church. I was in the eighth grade -- just a budding horn soloist-- and I had spent the past several months working diligently on the technical difficulties of a Mozart piece. I was finally ready to premiere the solo in church, and I was positive that it would provoke sighs of wonder and delight all the way from the first pew to the very last.

It was just as I had imagined -- crisp, clear notes, a rich tone and lovely, lyrical phrases. Almost perfect -- that was, until the middle of the second page. I took a large breath and puckered up to play a high G... and instead, something resembling an F flat came out at full volume. I was so shaken, I lost my place in the music and began improvising with a melody Mozart would have never recognized. The harder I tried to find my place and get back on track, the more wrong notes I played. I sped up, I slowed down, but I just could not find my way back to the measure I was supposed to be playing.

It was a nightmare. To add insult to injury, my brother was sitting in the front pew that day. I suddenly understood why directors are so adamant about musicians staying focused on the music or the conductor. I tried my best to focus, but in my peripheral vision I could see Cody's shoulders rocking the entire pew as he erupted into uncontrollable, silent laughter.

I was certain that I was either going to have to change religions or convince my parents to let me do a study abroad in a country where no one recognized the name Skogberg when the accompanist caught my eye. In a split second she looked directly at me, gave me a reassuring smile and held her chord just long enough for me to take a deep breath and regain my composure. It was as if she were saying, "Come on, Cari. You can do it. I'm here to help you through." And she did. The support and reassurance she offered in

that glance gave me the courage to finish the piece. I won't say that everything went perfectly from that point on. I still hit some wrong notes and hesitated on the tough sections of the music, but she followed me exactly and covered my goofs with strong, resonating, beautiful chords. If it weren't for her accompaniment, I never would have made it through to the last note.

I learned a great deal from that experience. I learned that it takes a heck of a lot of breath support to nail a high G in public, I learned that when singing or playing in church, I should always position myself so my brother is not in sight, and most importantly I learned that my music would not have been nearly as effective that day without the gift of accompaniment. My notes by themselves, when played correctly, made beautiful music. But their effect was so much richer and fuller and more expressive when supported by complementary sounds. And when my ability to play the notes they way they were written fell short, it was the accompaniment that kept the piece going.

How true that is for us as well. We can do many things with great strength and conviction on our own, but the Lord didn't design us to always play solo. He gifted us with empathy, compassion, and the ability to stand by one another -- to accompany one another -- in the moments when we can't stand alone.

One of my favorite examples of God's gift of accompaniment comes from Luke 24-- the story of Jesus on the road to Emmaus. The events of the preceding days had devastated and perplexed the apostles. As they walked together down a seven mile stretch of road, they tried to make sense out of the crucifixion of the man they had believed to be Christ and out of the women's' insistence that Jesus' body had disappeared from the tomb. Suddenly, a stranger appeared to them and asked what they were discussing. Hardly able to lift their downcast eyes, they said, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

As they continued on together for the next seven miles, they told the stranger about their great sorrow over the death and crucifixion of Jesus, not realizing it was actually Jesus to whom they were speaking. One of them even said, "but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is third day since all this took place."

If I had been Jesus, I think it would have been tempting to let the cat out of the bag at that moment. Can you imagine how much he must have wanted to make himself recognized and say to the men, "But look! Hey, it's me! Check out the scars. Don't be so sad! Don't you remember what the prophets said about Christ having to suffer before entering his glory? I'm back! Life is good!"

But Jesus knew that what the apostles needed now was not a quick solution or easy answers to the questions with which they were wrestling. If they were to go out into the world and effectively give testimony to the Gospel message, they would need to thoroughly understand how Jesus' entire life fulfilled the predictions of the prophets. So instead of making a grand and glorious re-appearance, Jesus simply accompanied them

and for seven miles, explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. It wasn't until he broke bread later at the evening meal that they finally realized who he was. And at that moment, he disappeared from their sight. Jesus was there, accompanying the apostles during a time when their grief and confusion kept them from being able to make it through the crisis on their own. He walked alongside them -- not waving a magic wand and making everything better -- but supporting them through fellowship and offering strength, encouragement and wisdom that they would later use in proclaiming the Gospel message.

The story doesn't stop there. Throughout centuries, Christians have been called to follow Jesus' example and accompany one another. But the more I study Christ's unique approach to literally "walking alongside" those he wished to serve, the more I realize that sometimes in attempting to emulate his outreach, we miss the entire point. Often, our view of missions or of service is centered around a one-time, feel-good approach. Our society is addicted to the quick fix. It's important to donate food to the needy or to serve at the Banquet or to take a mission trip to a foreign country. God gives us opportunities to reach out in a thousand different ways to those in need. But if we are content to be involved only when it is convenient for us or only as a way to occasionally soothe our consciences, we are not really accompanying one another. Accompaniment is a long-term process. It means that we will take time to walk with one another, to stand by one another and to truly see one another as equals rather than donors and recipients. It requires an ongoing effort to understand the issues and situations that have caused the problems we are so eager to cure. It's not a quick fix, but rather a commitment to stick around and be there to lift up one another in times of joy as well as times of need.

Many of you remember little Karina Martinez, the 6-year-old Nicaraguan girl born with a deformity in her feet that made it nearly impossible for her to walk. After meeting her during a medical missions trip to Nicaragua, Dr. Richard and Carol Wake from Brookings worked diligently to find a way to bring her to Sioux Falls for corrective surgery last year. I nearly exploded with joy at the thought of seeing Karina walk for the first time on two straight feet. However, I soon realized that the initial surgery was only a small part of the healing process. As I translated for her and her grandmother during months of check-ups, cast changes and physical therapy sessions, I understood more and more how difficult it was for them to face such confusing and painful procedures in a foreign country where they did not even speak the language. Recovery was a long, grueling process made more challenging by the shock of going from a village without running water or electricity to a modern Mecca where meals are cooked in microwaves and clothing washed in automatic machines.

What Karina and Herminia needed at that point was not just physical help, but accompaniment by those who cared for their emotional needs as well. Thanks to the strength and friendships offered by so many from Augustana and the wider Sioux Falls community, they were able to persevere and continue moving forward step by step, until at last, Karina's feet were healed. I was honored to walk alongside Karina as she took her first steps and bought her first pair of shoes. But what brought me the greatest joy

was witnessing the willingness of total strangers to truly accompany the little girl and her grandma through the most difficult moments of their journey.

Whom has God asked you to accompany lately? Who has accompanied you? Was it in a New York City soup kitchen? At a retreat center in Pine Ridge? In your dorm room? On the practice field? Have you been accompanied or called to accompany another in a particularly difficult class? In the cafeteria? In your neighborhood back home? In the life of a child who adores you and needs your support?

Micah 6:8 says, “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? Do justice. Love mercy. Walk humbly with your God.”

If we recognize the face of Christ in those around us, we can re-read the verse this way: “With humility, accompany your God. With humility, accompany one another.”

God is calling us to provide not just a one-time donation, but a true commitment to accompany those in need. Listen carefully as God speaks through those around you to offer his personal invitation -- “Come. Follow. Accompany me.”

MORNING WORSHIP

Monday, Nov. 24, 2003

Prelude

Prelude & Toccata on "Praise to the Lord"

By J. Wayne Kerr

David Prowant, organ

Welcome/announcements

Invocation

L: Like disciples on the road to Emmaus, we talk on the way about the things that are happening.

C: Jesus comes and walks with us.

L: We gather in hopes that we may be redeemed.

C: Jesus, open the Scriptures to us.

L: We beg Jesus to stay with us.

C: And open our eyes that we may see.

Prayer

ANTHEM

"Sing a New Song"

Faculty/staff choir

Sarah Harrold, flute

Scripture

Luke 24: 13-38

Sermon

"*Accompany Me*"

Cari Skogberg

Hymn

"God of Life"

Congregation - vv. 1, 2, 4, Choir v. 3

God of life, in Christ You lead us, guiding us along the way.

In our past, through joys and sorrows,

You have been our strength and stay.

Keep us faithful, true disciples, in our learning and our praise,

Celebrating past and present, consecrating future day.

God of words and Word Incarnate, words that challenge and embrace,

Grant us boldness in our speaking, while we know your loving grace.

Give us words both clear and winsome,

loving hearts and list'ning ears,

Celebrating past and present, consecrating future year.

(Choir sings third verse)

God of days and years and eons. Still you call as in the past.
Work undone demands our labor; Justice yearns for peace at last.
Yours the vision and the challenge; Ours the mission and the praise.
Celebrating past and present, consecrating future days.

Setting by Michael Burkhardt
Flutes: Sarah Harrold & Jennie Helland

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Prayers

Benediction

Postlude “Now Thank We All Our God Egil Hovland

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

CHAPEL DECORATING PARTY - Looking for a way to celebrate your return from Thanksgiving Break?! Why not attend the chapel decorating party on Sunday, Nov. 30th, 8 pm!! There will be decorating of all kinds: ornament, cookie, tree and chapel. Get in the mood for Christmas with fun, food, fellowship, music.

CHRISTMAS PAGEANT - On Tuesday, Dec. 9th, 10 am, there will be a Christmas Pageant in the Chapel. If you would like to be involved in a unique portrayal of the Christmas story, contact Noel Kahl (4891) or the chapel office (5403).

CHAPEL SCHEDULE

TUESDAY Roman Catholic Mass, 10 am - Msg. John
 McEneaney
MONDAY Worship, 10 am - Richard Swanson, Religion
TUESDAY Worship, 10 am - *Sinai* Praise Band
WEDNESDAY Holy Communion, 10 am - ELCA Bishop