I’m going to begin by reading you a quote. I don’t love the idea of taking a quote out of context, but I want to recite to you a small snippet from the poet Mary Oliver anyway. I figure that if I were to ever write something that people can take even a small piece of and find it helpful, that I would want them to apply it however they want. (Within reason, I suppose)

Here it is.

“Instructions for living a life:

1. Pay Attention.

2. Be Astonished.

3. Tell About it.”

I found this quote my sophomore year, amidst taking Cell Biology, Organic Chemistry, and doing biology research with Dr. Howard, and at first the words struck me because they sounded exactly like the Scientific Method.

Pay attention, make observations.

Be astonished. Many times, the results of an experiment are astonishing for one reason or another.

Tell about it. Science depends on disseminating information.
The quote also resonated with me as an aspiring writer. It is essential to pay attention to details—like the way the first snow looks on Ole’s statue (or how snow in April looks on Ole’s statue), or the way wet clay looks spinning on a ceramist’s wheel. And it’s equally important to be astonished by your observations, to see them as wonderful and worthy to write about, which in the world of an author, is of course the “tell about it” part.

But outside of academic application, this quote applies to our lives in general, I think. And to our faith. Paying attention adds richness to our lives. Yes, it’s important to pay attention to the beauty around us—the color of a maple in fall, the way a friend stays up late to study with you, even though it’s clear that she’s prepared. But paying attention can mean more than that. I think it can mean seeing what God intends for us to see. In the scripture, everyone assumes that either the man born blind or his parent must have sinned for him to be blind. But Jesus says, “Neither this man nor his parent sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.” God wants to use the blind man to show people a miracle, but they refuse to see it. Instead of seeing a miracle, they solely see someone who sinned and deserved to be blind. This was the predominant belief of the time, that suffering was a punishment for sinning, and if a person was suffering, they certainly did something to deserve it.

During my years at Augie, I have gotten better at paying attention, and I bet that you all have too. I try to notice things about the natural world, about words, and about people. But one thing I’ve learned is that sometimes you don’t see what’s right in front of you, because you think you already know what’s in front of you. This sometimes happens in scientific research. There’s just so much standardization and protocol, and acceptance of theories, that it’s easy to overlook the details. Research aims to be objective, obviously, and not let our expectations taint our results, but it can be difficult to accept results that differ greatly from expectations. But then I think
about the great scientific discoveries that were made when people departed from the paradigms,
and seeing what’s in front of you becomes more important than what you think you know. I think
that this failure to see what was actually in front of them was the issue the Pharisees had. They
were probably thinking “oh, here’s just a standard case of a sinner suffering from the punishment
he deserves. Let’s follow protocol and see why he deserved to be blind” and they were too busy
fixating on that to see that HELLO! This man who was blind can SEE now. Jesus points out that
because the Pharisees say they can see, they cannot see and their sins remain. I interpret this as,
because they assert that they know the truth and refuse to see or understand the truth, they are the
ones missing the point here.

The Pharisees are missing the “Be astonished” part of it, too. They refuse to be astonished,
maybe because that might somehow be admitting that they are inferior or unintelligent. Maybe
it’d be admitting that something got the best of them. Or they are just hesitant to depart from
their protocol, I don’t know. The man born blind even says to them, “Here is an astonishing
thing!” You’d think he wouldn’t have to point that out. I just don’t understand why the Pharisees
are so hesitant to be astonished, but I know that we shouldn’t be reluctant to be astonished. We
need to let the things we see move us and affect us. When we see a mountain range, or see an
interesting patch of moss on a tree, it’s okay to be astonished by its beauty. When we learn that
there is millions of tons of plastic in the Ocean, it’s all right to be awestruck. Yeah, this one is
not astonished in a good way, but it’s nonetheless important to be moved by this knowledge;
Jesus healed the blind man to awe people, and to make them feel something. Being amazed is
giving credit where credit is due. If you think something is beautiful, or sad, or expansive, or
intricate, or just awesome, then you owe it a moment of your life to be astonished. It is right and
respectful, I think, to be filled with wonder at whatever you pay attention to.
And though today’s piece of scripture didn’t delve into it, the natural progression of the steps, according to Mary Oliver, is to tell about it. I like this idea that our attentiveness and astonishment can drive us to an action. Tell about it. This part can mean talk about it, sure. But I also think this can mean act on it or think about it. We should let our astonishment lead us to reflect on this respect and reverence we have. Through our actions and our words, we can tell about what we pay attention to and what we care about. We can make a scientific discovery, or write a book, or help promote a government policy, or whatever we need to do that respects what caught our attention and moved us to be astonished.

So, I hope that we can all pay attention to what matters and to not be obscured by what we think we know. I want to pay attention to what is really there, to observe the little things and grapple with the big things, things that are microscopic—like how cool Bacilli bacteria look on an agar plate—to things that are larger than we can comprehend. Let’s just pay attention and see these things for what they are. And though we are sometimes hesitant to be utterly surprised, it is right to be astonished and to be moved to action and reflection.

Scripture: John 9:1-45 (parts summarized)

Opening prayer:

God, thank you for this beautiful and abundant world. We ask that you make us attentive, and that you open our minds to being astonished by your wondrous works. You amaze us in many ways, so take our attentiveness and our awe and inspire us to act and reflect. We ask that you help us take our reverence and turn it into caring and stewardship. Make what we say and do for one another and for the Earth demonstrate our astonishment of your work. AMEN.
Morning Worship  
Friday, April 4, 2014

Prelude Matthew Anderson
Welcome/Announcements
Invocation
Prayer Ashley Schmidt
Hymn This Is My Father’s World ELW #824
Scripture John 9: 1-41 Lauren Ponwith
Message Claire Bestul  
Biology major & English minor 
Faribault MN
Song Beautiful Savior Amanda Strenge, Julia Blue,  
Elliot Blue, and Travis Miller
Prayer
Benediction and Dismissal
Postlude Matthew Anderson

A special thanks to Lauren and Ashley for reading and to Julia, Amanda,  
Elliot, Travis, and Matt for sharing their musical gifts!

WORSHIP SCHEDULE
Fri, April 4 Catholic Mass & Stations of the Cross 12:00 Noon
Sun, April 6 Worship Service, 11 am, April Birthday Blessing 
Catholic Mass, 8 pm
Mon, April 7 Worship Service, 10 am, Susan Hasseler
Tues, April 8 Common Ground, 9 pm
Wed, April 9 Holy Communion, 10 am, Earl Sherburne & Brass Choir
Thurs, April 10 Catholic Mass & Stations of the Cross 12:00 noon

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CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVICE OPPORTUNITY - NECESSITIES FOR NEIGHBORS, a distribution program of hygiene products to people in need is looking for volunteers to serve at Necessities for Neighbors on Sunday, April 6 at 2:10 p.m. If interested, please contact Pastor Ann or add your name to the sign-up sheet in the Narthex. A group from Augustana will carpool to the location.

THE BIRTHDAY CLUB is a new opportunity to integrate faith and service. Those with April birthdays will be blessed at worship on Sunday, April 6. The service project for those with March or April birthdays is with Necessities for Neighbors. You are invited to donate diapers, wipes, toilet paper, or laundry soap and/or to volunteer on April 6.

The PROFESSOR’S BEST LECTURE SERIES - next lecture will be given by DRS PRESTON & GUBBELS on April 7 at 3:00 p.m. in the 3-in-1 Room Morrison Commons. Their lecture is titled, “Technology and Reproduction: Where is the Ethical Line?” This presentation comes from the Capstone Course: Life’s Cycles: Birth, Death and the History of Medicine. Gubbels and Preston will, using “clickers,” ask challenging questions of the audience regarding the impact of technology on reproduction. Technology continues to make many advances with regards to reproduction, but with each step comes challenging ethical questions.

Interested students are invited to a two day INTERFAITH CONFERENCE at Augustana Rock Island June 1-3. Speakers include Eboo Patel and presiding bishop Elizabeth Eaton. No cost; transportation from Sioux Falls is included. If interested, see Pr. Paul or Pr Ann.

Augustana (SD) Campus Ministry