

Augustana College  
Chapel of Reconciliation

**Blessed and Called**

**Fenecia Homan**

May 6, 2005

I have had an amazing opportunity this past year to work with immigrant and refugee children at the Family Immersion Center here in Sioux Falls. I find myself struggling to describe how these children have had an impact on me. When I arrive in the mornings I am greeted with hugs, smiles, high fives, and “good morning miss fenecia or miss fish (my name sounds like fish to them). Throughout the morning I get to celebrate and struggle with these children as they learn the alphabet, how to count, and how to read among other things. I fail miserably when I try to explain the joy that exudes from these children. They are so proud of where they are from, yet they are excited about where they are now. These children have changed the way I think about and understand other cultures.

When I press harder to describe my experience at the Immersion Center I land on the term “blessed”. But what does it mean to be blessed? The term is frequently used but what does it mean when one says “I feel so blessed” or “You have my blessings” or “May God bless you”. Being blessed is more than luck. I think the word is frequently linked with privilege, but this link often takes on a negative connotation as it may imply ownership-something that one person possesses and another does not. In my study Bible blessed is defined as happy or fortunate, but even that definition does not grasp the aura of the word.

I can recall several moments throughout my life when I have felt blessed. The moments that first come to mind are often the “happy” or joyous moments...time spent with my family and friends, the day the adoption of my brother finally became a reality, my summers spent working at camp, and opportunities to travel. But when I think a little longer about when I feel blessed, it becomes apparent that “blessed” times occur most often in our daily routines and environment.

Throughout the past few years at Augie I have been challenged to clarify and articulate what I believe. My eyes have been opened to the complexity, yet simplicity of faith. I have had numerous opportunities to learn in and outside of the classroom. I have been surrounded by people that inspire those around them. And I have been encouraged to pursue my call to ministry. Is it possible to define this state of being that is so interwoven with one’s faith?

In the Gospel text that we read this morning we hear the beatitudes from the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus sat down on the mountain and taught the beatitudes to his disciples. The beatitudes do not describe or list what we should do to be blessed, rather they describe who we are right now and affirm that we are blessed in each moment-in each struggle and in each joy. Blessed are the poor in spirit, Blessed are those who mourn, Blessed are the meek, Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the pure in heart, Blessed are the peacemakers, Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

We can all think of moments when we fit in to each of these categories. Sometimes life really stinks. When loved ones die, when money becomes a constant concern, when we have arguments, when finals and papers are looming, when relationships fall apart, when we are ill... but Whether we are struggling, succeeding, or even just existing we are blessed and God is there supporting us as after each condition is listed a promise follows. The gospel is speaking to and describing each of us.

The children at the Immersion Center have shown me what it is to be blessed. These children have been persecuted and driven from their countries. Many of them have lost at least one parent if not both and live with several people that they may or may not be related to in a single apartment. They are in a new country with a new language and are desperately trying to understand what is going on around them. They are often treated as second-class citizens by others. One may initially think these children are anything but blessed, but I believe that understand what being blessed means more than any of us. They embrace what they have been given to them and eagerly share it with those around them. They include each other and help and support one another. Amidst their struggles they find purpose and share their joy as blessed children.

Last semester I took a class on the theology of Martin Luther. While I am still wrestling with what I learned and heard, one thing that really sticks out is that Luther believed we are who we are and we cannot do anything to change that. As I listened to Professor Croghan's lectures I became increasingly discontent with this notion. Faith is connected to hope...where is the hope in believing that I am stuck in who I am? Why bother with life if I can't do anything to make it better? Aren't we supposed to always strive to become better? There is a competitive edge in each one of us that wants to be

the best. Haven't we been taught that there is always room for improvement? Can't I always become a better student...A better daughter...A better listener...A better leader...A better citizen...A better employee...A better Christian?

In the reading from Micah this morning God brings a challenge...a lawsuit against Israel because the Israelites have broken the covenant. The Lord wants to know what has been done to make Israel so ungrateful. The Lord as the plaintiff reminds Israel of the exodus and of other key saving acts throughout salvation history. As the defense, Israel responds by asking God what God expects in return for what God has done. What can they do to make amends with God?... can they bow?...can they bring burnt offerings?...can they offer their firstborn in exchange for their sins? The questions push to the extreme. Is there anything they can do that is sufficient enough for God? The response of the Israelites to God's charges are similar to how we often respond. Crap...I have screwed up...what can *I* do to make up for it?...How can I fix it? How can I make it better? We often search for the quick-fix or the easy answer.

In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul writes, "Consider your own call, brothers and sisters-As Paul says-not many of us are wise, not many of us are powerful, not many of us are of noble birth-but God identifies with and uses each of us to spread the gospel. God does not expect us to be someone that we are not. God calls each one of us to be faithful in each moment and to be at that place where our gifts and abilities intersect the world's needs. While I initially understood Luther's theology to be hopeless and confining, I gradually came to understand it as hopeful and freeing.

It is easy to get overwhelmed with the needs of the world and to feel like we are not doing enough and that we won't really make a difference anyway. People are

hungry, people are oppressed, people have been deserted, people are ridiculed, people are shunned, people are sick, people are lonely. Will our world ever be just? Will there ever be complete peace on Earth? Will there ever be a time when no one is being persecuted? Rather than wallowing in the enormity of the injustice and not doing anything, God calls each one of us to live a lifestyle of doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly *with* God. We are not on our own. The response to the Israelites' questions and Paul's words in First Corinthians do not give us permission to back off or give up, rather they challenge us to live a life that does not seek the simple or easy answers. Justice, kindness, and humility are not found in a diet or a pill or a book. God does not call us to live this lifestyle so that we may have eternal life, but because of God's grace it is given to us through faith and we are freed to embrace God's call to do justice, love kindness, and to walk humbly with our Lord.

Blessed are you...Amen

# MORNING WORSHIP

Friday, May 6, 2005

## PRELUDE

## WELCOME/ANNOUNCEMENTS

**LITANY** Taken from the ELCA's "A Service of Peace"

L: God of faithfulness we come to you in our faithlessness.

**C: We confess that we approach our lives and our world more in fear than in hope.**

L: At times, we grow weary with well-doing and despair of your promises.

**C: We allow disappointments to blind us and setbacks to embitter us.**

L: We become tired of the struggle for love, justice and peace and we give up.

**C: We are in need of fresh energy and renewed hope, new beginnings and new ideas.**

L: What change are we able to effect with our words, our actions, our prayer?

**C: We need your grace to unsettle and redirect our hearts.**

L: We need your passion to rekindle and sustain our passion for peace and justice.

**C: We need your love to reveal to us the ever-present possibility for change and conversation and growth.**

L: We believe your spirit is at work in our world.

**C: Give us eyes of faith that we may discern the signs and wonders in our midst, and give us the courage to live in hope.**

L: O God we believe, help our unbelief!

**All: Amen**

**GATHERING SONG** "We Are Called" (See inside of bulletin)

**SCRIPTURE**

Micah 6:1-8  
Matthew 5:1-12

**MESSAGE**

"Blessed and Called"

Fenecia Homan  
Major: Math  
Hometown: Brandon, SD

**CLOSING PRAYER****BLESSING****DISMISSAL****POSTLUDE**

THANK YOU to Pr. Paul, Carol, Betsy, Aaron, Matt, and Sarah for helping with worship this morning.

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**CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS**

We anticipate ALL CAMPUS WORSHIP on Friday, May 13. All staff, faculty, students and friends are welcome to give thanks for the gifts school year.

Sunday, May 15 the Student Congregation will celebrate Pentecost. Students [and faculty] are invited to bring a paper for the burnt offering! Wear red for this third great Festival of the church year!

ALL ARE INVITED to Father Mike’s First Ever Viking/Cougar 1K run. **Wednesday, May 19<sup>th</sup> at 4 pm. Christ the King Catholic Church** at the corner of 26<sup>th</sup> and Lake. Wear your most authentic running outfit! Numbers will be provided! \$10 entry fee for t-shirts and refreshments. Sign up on the chapel narthex table and leave your entry fee with Carol.

CHAPEL SCHEDULE

Sunday	Worship, 11 am - Kate Holmquest, Church Rel./Outreach Dir.
Monday	Worship, 10 am - Murray Haar, Reli.
Tuesday	Koinonia, 10 am
Wednesday	Ascension Worship, 10 am - Pr. Paul; Faculty/Staff choir
Thursday	Chair of Moral Values - Joel Johnson, Govt.
Friday	All campus worship, 10 am
Sunday	Worship, 11 am - Pr. Paul