It’s a little strange to be up here. This is where my father is supposed to be. Or if not him, my grandfather. Or if not him, my uncle. Ministers all. Yes, I’m the elder son who did NOT enter the family business. Mostly it was because I preferred to preach in 50-minute increments. Nevertheless, I’m here now.

As a pastor’s kid, a PK, I had access to all the wonderful, mysterious, behind-the-scenes workings of a small town church. Not only could my brother and I play hide-and-seek in my Dad’s office and the empty Sunday School rooms on Saturdays, but we were also able to get answers to some of life’s biggest questions. Like “Who gets all that money in the offering plate?” or “If I’m really hungry, can I ask for two communion wafers?” And of course, “Where do bulletins come from?” I had inside information on all of these issues.

As I grew older, I began to appreciate these churches more as voluntary associations, as institutions. I became aware of all the different interactions, traditions, procedures, that make a church a church.

There were the expressions of common faith in worship, a shared understanding of justice and a life well lived.

There were the theological and political debates, often taking place between mouthfuls of Jello salad at a basement pot luck dinner. Like a symposium of classical antiquity, but with tater tot casserole instead.

There were examples of direct democratic governance, as the congregation chose its leaders, called its pastor, and decided matters of policy. Sometimes wisely, sometimes not. But always in a strongly democratic manner.

There were the practical lessons in property rights—or the lack thereof—as my mother would have to petition the church council for permission to paint the walls of the parsonage.

There were wonderful examples of selflessness, of charity, of service, of kindness, of inclusion. There were also many instances of intolerance, gossip, hypocrisy, harsh judgment. The church seemed to bring out the best and worst of people, which was fascinating to a young observer.

Once my father oversaw the merging of two churches. The questions of where to meet and how to meld the two congregations into one, and how to pay the pastor were figured out pretty easily. The real sticking point was what to do with the extra set of plates and silverware. Which set would they use? Which would they discard? This occupied hours of debate and discussion. Tempers flared. I don’t remember how this got resolved—mostly because I thought it a silly controversy. What could matter less than this?
And yet, looking back on this episode, I realize that I was judging it based on very little understanding. For all I know, these sets of silverware and plates were given in memory of someone dear, and thus meant a great deal to those defending their use. I don’t know that this is the case, but I also don’t know that it isn’t. This issue still nags me to this day, because there are so many times in life where we dismiss a claim or concern, with very little curiosity about the root of the matter.

More broadly, it was this early education into church politics that helped interest me in politics and government in general.

And I’ve come to appreciate the ways in which politics and religion are intertwined in our world. We see examples in the headlines almost every day. What makes these two realms so vigorous, so dangerous, so powerful? Why is it that we’re told to discuss neither religion nor politics over dinner?

I suggest that in both religion and politics, two human tendencies come into awkward conflict.

The first is the tendency to be sure of oneself, to be confident in one’s beliefs, to be sure that others are mistaken.

The second is the tendency to recognize our own limitations, to doubt, to shrink from controversy.

Where the first tendency, that of stridency, dominates in politics, we tend to see fights over principles. Religious wars, struggles for emancipation, revolutions for equality or liberty. We see the most wonderful sorts of progress, and the most horrific acts of violence, of ethnic cleansing, genocide, terrorism. In this context, I’m reminded of the following quote by Mark Twain:

Man is a Religious Animal. He is the only Religious Animal. He is the only animal that has the True Religion--several of them. He is the only animal that loves his neighbor as himself and cuts his throat if his theology isn't straight. He has made a graveyard of the globe in trying his honest best to smooth his brother's path to happiness and heaven
- "The Lowest Animal"

Where the second tendency—the tendency to doubt—dominates, we tolerate the opinions of others, we learn from others, we refrain from judgment, we agree to disagree. This can have wonderful results. It is necessary for a liberal arts education, after all. But in the world of politics, too much of this can cause people to become quiescent in the face of evil, too humble about the value of their own ideals, and virtually incapable of judgment.

Keep in mind that this is no merely academic controversy. In discussions of religion and politics, people really care about the result. The salvation of my soul is at stake, or the safety of my community, or the welfare of my children. Under these circumstances, reasoned argument is only part of what is going on. We’re talking about what we fear, what we love, what we despise, what we hate. Our emotions become heavily involved. Contests among true believers and doubters, in other words, take place on the grandest of stages.

We are in the midst of the 150th anniversary of our own greatest contest, which pitted North against South across five Aprils. This was a war that that gave ample expression to that first tendency—that of confidence in one’s ideals. From the North: the strident abolitionism of the radical Republicans, John
Brown’s provocative acts of violence, The Battle Hymn of the Republic. From the South: sharply worded defenses of slavery—and 150 years ago as of tomorrow, the adoption of the Great Seal of the Confederate States of America. In the center: George Washington, a symbol of great principles of liberty, of revolutionary struggle. The motto underneath: God is our vindicator. Both sides thought this would be over in a hurry, and that God was on their side. The confidence of the true believer.

I was reading Abraham Lincoln’s second inaugural address again the other day, and I was struck by how well Lincoln expresses—in only 700 words, which is less than half of what I have here!—both the confidence and doubt that in turn seized his mind. A man of strong principles, Lincoln nevertheless recognized that the world is a complicated place, where we never have as much information as we would like, and in which divine will is devilishly hard to figure out. These human limitations cause a wise leader to hedge a bit in applying principles to reality. Instead of calling for immediate abolition, for example, Lincoln favored halting the spread of slavery and preserving the union. Once the war was underway, he continued to agonize over what to do about slavery, before at last issuing his Emancipation Proclamation.

In his Second Inaugural, given as the war was finally winding down, Lincoln points out that

Both [sides] read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. . . . The prayers of both could not be answered. That of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes.

But it is in the very last paragraph that Lincoln beautifully expresses his ideal for balancing confidence in one’s own principles with attention to the needs and identity of others, weaving in references from scripture. You’ve heard these words before, but let yourself soak in them.

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation’s wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

It is difficult to find a better statement of how to reconcile the two competing tendencies in our nature. This is not to say, of course, that words alone can bring about justice and peace. One man, standing just yards from Lincoln, listened intently to every word of the speech. Yet six weeks later, this man, John Wilkes Booth, proceeded to assassinate him. Lincoln’s words failed to defuse that true believer. Yet these words continue to resonate across the decades, serving as a helpful aid as we muddle through the crowded ways of life as citizens, and as we today celebrate student leadership here at Augustana.
MORNING WORSHIP
Monday, April 29, 2013

Prelude “I Sing the Mighty Power of God” by James Curnow
Emily Eichele, horn - Marilyn Schempp, organ

Invocation
Prayer
ALL: God, you call your servants to ventures of which we cannot see
the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us
faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that
your hand is leading us and your love supporting us, through Jesus
Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Hymn “Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life” ELW # 719

Scripture Romans 12: 1-10

Sermon “Called to the City” Dr. Joel Johnson, government

Anthem “Oh, Give Thanks Unto the Lord” by Jean Berger
Chamber Choir, Dir. Paul Nesheim

ASA Inauguration
President - Matt Anderson
Vice President - Krista Youngberg
Treasurer - Seth Vogelsang
Senior Class Senators - Amanda Johnson, Emily Grandprey, Emily Weber,
Jesse Fonkert, Jessica Johnson
Junior Class Senators
Brittany Dardis, Hanna Werling, Joel Hermann, Leah Murfield
Taylor Lambert
Sophomore Class Senators
Elliot Blue, Dillon Cathro, Kat Van Gerpen, Matt Bell, Naras Prameswari

Benediction
Postlude “All Creatures of Our God and King” By James Curnow
Emily Eichele, horn

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

South Dakota Synod Assembly, ELCA will be June 7-8 at Our Savior’s. Our
student congregation may send one male and one female delegate. Please see Pr.
Paul or Pr. Ann if you are interested. Preference is given to students from South

Malaria Campaign - Thurs. night’s Silent Auction and Concert were a HUGE
success. We raised close to $1500 (which will be matched by the ELCA!!) There
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Mondays for the remainder of the semester will focus on vocation in an Easter
series we are calling, “Called to Live.” Pastor Paul began the series then
Professors Julie Ashworth, Joel Johnson - 4/29, Jenny Gubbels - 5/6,
and Patrick Hicks - 5/13 will reflect on their faith, disciplines, callings, service of
neighbor and community.

TAIZE AT PINE RIDGE, May 24-27. Any students interested in going to the
Taize International meeting at Pine Ridge in May are encouraged to meet with Pr.
Paul. We want to spread the word widely about this rare and exciting weekend of
solidarity with our Native neighbors! Sign up sheet is on the Narthex table.

Want to learn more about Taize??? Come to the chapel for conversation and
worship on Wednesday, May 8, 7-9pm. Brother John and a team of friends from
Taize, France will be present as we learn about what Taize is and the impact this
movement is having on young adults around the world. All are welcome.

The Common Ground/Outreach Bonanza will be held out on the Green on
Friday, May 10th from 6:00pm to Saturday, May 11th in the morning, to
celebrate a great year of fellowship and get excited for next year; ALL are
welcome! Friday evening we will be playing games, singing songs, enjoying a
bonfire, eating snacks and star gazing. Big group events will end that evening but
the option is available for people to spend the night on the Green; Augie Outdoor
Club will be providing some camping materials (sleeping bags, etc.) but consider
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Washington DC. In addition to inspiring workshops and advocacy training,
there is an opportunity to meet with our South Dakota congressional delegation to
personally discuss hunger issues locally and globally. BFW-SD would cover
transportation, registration fees, and lodging. If you are interested or know of
someone who is interested, please contact Nancy Olson, 605-332-4350,
s10andyw@sio.midco.net for further information and to request an application
before April 15, 2013. You can also find information about the event at
www.bread.org

CHAPEL SCHEDULE
Wed., May 1 Holy Communion, 10 am - Jetty and Steve Matzner; Angelus
Fri., May 3rd Morning Worship, 10 am - Erin Schoenbeck
Sun., May 5th Morning Worship, 11 am - Megan Kremin, Sr. Spkr.
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