

Augustana College  
Chapel of Reconciliation

John Clementson

26 April 2004

**Psalm 46:4** There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,  
the holy place where the Most High dwells.

**Revelation 22: 1-5**

The River of Life

1Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal,  
flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2down the middle of the  
great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life,  
bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves  
of the tree are for the healing of the nations. 3No longer will there be any  
curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his  
servants will serve him. 4They will see his face, and his name will be on  
their foreheads. 5There will be no more night. They will not need the light of  
a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And  
they will reign for ever and ever.

**Isaiah 33: 20-22**

20 Look upon Zion, the city of our festivals;  
your eyes will see Jerusalem,  
a peaceful abode, a tent that will not be moved;  
its stakes will never be pulled up,  
nor any of its ropes broken.  
21 There the LORD will be our Mighty One.  
It will be like a place of broad rivers and streams.  
No galley with oars will ride them,  
no mighty ship will sail them.  
22 For the LORD is our judge,  
the LORD is our lawgiver,  
the LORD is our king;  
it is he who will save us.

## Chapel Talk

Recently, while walking on the Big Sioux River Trail, I met a man walking, who in passing said, “it’s beginning to spit a little.” “Spit a little,” I thought to myself, what an unusual way to describe raindrops. The thought stuck with me as I walked along the river imagining how the water in the river got there. The scientist in me started to think about the water cycle.... You know evaporation, condensation, precipitation ...repeat the process. Moisture in the air gets pumped up from the Gulf of Mexico, collides with cold air from the north, condenses, gets too heavy and voila, you have “spit.” With it beginning to spit a little as I continued my walk I thought about how those small amounts of “spit” must have fallen somewhere, come together somewhere greater, and eventually made their way into the Big Sioux, and that the Big Sioux makes its way to the Missouri and eventually to the Mississippi before reaching its final destination in the Gulf of Mexico.... and you guessed it ...pumped back up to meet the cold air of the north and so on....the cycle continues.

As long as I can remember, I’ve had an affinity for water. My earliest childhood memories include times when I would go down to a small creek with my grandfather to fish. It wasn’t important that we caught fish, and it certainly didn’t matter what kind of fish we caught, for it was a time to be with a man I loved. While we sat on the banks of the creek with our cane poles and a can of hand dug worms, he would tell me stories about his days in the mustard gas filled trenches of France during WWI, or about his days as a mason after the war, or better yet, stories about my mother as a child in his household. I’m sure I wasn’t even ten years old when he began to let me drive his 1952 Plymouth with its three-speed gearshift on the column. He taught me how to skip second-gear as we would roll down those country roads.

He was a gentle man, one who spoke to me in ways that I am just beginning to realize and understand. He was one of the many tributaries in my river of life. With him and through him I was shaped, yet my true self was respected and honored. I will be forever grateful for the love he has passed on to me directly and indirectly through my mother. Recently, through teared-up eyes my mother shared with me that she always knew that her father loved her, but that he never told her so and that was the reason she has always said to

me and to my siblings “I love you.” What a gift they have both given me. “It’s beginning to spit a little.”

As a pre-adolescent, I would spend hours down at the county drainage ditch or Cottonwood Lake looking for creatures large and small, dead or alive. My parents seemed to never tire of the muddy shoes and clothes, the salamanders in jars, and the other assorted insects, snakes, and fish I would drag home from my explorations. They instilled in me a love of the outdoors, a sense of adventure, and an acceptance of who I was and what I was interested in. Later, my interests and their acceptance of them led to a bachelor’s degree in geology and a minor in biology.

Still later, my wife and I moved to Redwood Falls to begin our teaching and nursing careers. Situated on the confluence of the Redwood and Minnesota rivers we pursued our professional passions. Like other forks in the stream, the people and our experiences with them, in that place, and at that time left indelible marks on our lives. How vividly and fondly we remember that tributary.

Thirteen years ago, when most of you were just starting school, elementary school that is, I sat in the back pew of this chapel praying that I would have an opportunity to be employed at Augustana College. I was here interviewing for an assistant professor position in the education department. I had been offered a job at The Ohio State University, but didn’t feel the institution was a good fit, so I turned them down to interview at Augie. My Ph.D. advisors thought I was crazy. Why would you turn down a prestigious, Big Ten University position for some small, liberal arts school in Sioux Falls, SD? they asked. In my heart, I knew this place would be a good place for my family and me, and now I can answer my Ph.D. advisors’ question.

Come with me on the Augustana River journey. At times it has been like a swift and strong mountain stream and at other times it is as tranquil and placid as a meandering prairie river. What a ride it has been. The raft we are riding on is at times adrift without a rudder, but most of the time it is filled with determined and committed servants. Three brief stories about some folks I’ve met on this journey.

Early in my career here, I was privileged to work with colleagues who have committed their entire working lives to this institution. I have often

referenced them as the giants or the might oaks of this place. They have taught me lessons that will not soon be forgotten. They are humble and gracious gurus who let their lives speak. When they continually win teaching award, a consistent message that one hears from students is that these folks believed in them as people. They saw the potentialities of all their students. Like my grandpa letting me drive his Plymouth, they believed in their students and “spit a little” in their rivers. Thank you to the Giants.

About seven years ago a colleague and I created a Capstone course called Voice of the Other. The course, like a river has taken on a life of its own, a magical journey that impacts students and faculty alike in ways that can only be described as transformational. Powerful discussions about the question of “how then shall we live?” have changed the courses of our rivers. When four female students with common histories of having been raped find each other and their other in the form of convicted rapists in the penitentiary, both parties are changed. With tears in their eyes, the students shared in their presentations the “common humanity” they shared with their perceived enemy. In the words of one student, “I looked into his eyes and saw the eyes of my loving father.”

When future doctors in the class engaged their other identified as HIV, they found the face of a young man contemplating how to now live his life on new life-giving medications after having been given a death sentence a few years earlier. On the young man’s nightstand at the Berakah House our students found a book called “How then shall we live?” Coincidence? A small spit in their river? This group of young men meets annually at our lake cabin to discuss ...you guessed it... “how then shall we live?” Thanks to my colleagues for spitting a little.

Finally, I want to thank each student I’ve encountered at Augustana for your influence on my life. This time of year, many faculty members are asked to write letters of recommendation for students readying themselves for the next bend in their river. I have kept over a hundred letters in a file on my computer. Recently, while looking at the names of these students, a flood of memories rushed over me. These marvelous students have jumped into the river, splashing a little of their life on me in the process. Some of them I have lost track of, others are in touch periodically, and still others will surface somewhere again in my life. As I read their letters... I could here the voice of my parents as I came home with muddied shoes and slimy

salamanders. You are a person that I believe in....and I would love to call you my own. Thank you students for splashing. To my doctoral advisors, these are just a few of reasons I believe Augustana was a great choice. Taking the stream less padded was right for me.

In his recent book “Let Your Life Speak,” Parker Palmer writes eloquently of becoming one’s self through a quest for vocation. Like many of you, Palmer wonders about the ever-present questions of Who am I? What ought I to do with my life? And, will my life’s work make any difference in the world? Palmer’s central thesis is that “vocation” or “calling” does not come from a voice external to ourselves, a voice of moral demand that asks us to become someone we are not yet—someone different, someone better, someone just beyond our reach. Rather, he suggests that vocation is not a goal to be achieved but it is a gift to be received. Discovering vocation does not mean scrambling toward some prize just beyond my reach, but accepting the treasure, accepting the gift of true self. Furthermore, he suggests that vocation comes from a voice “in here” calling me to be the person I was born to be, to fulfill the original selfhood given me at birth by God.

I wonder if accepting the gift of self is more challenging and demanding than attempting to become something or someone other than one’s self.

If you have doubts about Palmer’s thesis, look at any child and you will soon learn that she has been given her own gifted form, with the shape of her own sacred soul. This is a fascinating idea to me as an educator. For if I believe that each student, and each colleague is a gift from God, then I have an awesome responsibility and opportunity to engage your potentialities, and with you and through you we can be changed and, at the same time remain true to ourselves. Our rivers meet and we are still water, but together our sum is greater than our oneness.

As many of you know, I am leaving Augustana to continue my work at Gustavus in St. Peter, Mn. The river continues to flow to its final destination. Again, I find myself at a confluence, a time of transition. Many of you are in transitions of your own. Some of you are graduating and moving on to the next whitewater rapids. Some of you, I suspect are enjoying the slow, peaceful, pace of your river, but wondering what is around the next bend. Some of you may be hanging onto the life raft as you

face turbulent times. Still others of you are trembling on the riverbank, as you fear that you might get your feet wet.

Find your deepest calling in order to grow into your authentic self. As you do so, you will not only find the joy that every human seeks—you will also find your path of authentic service to the world. As Frederick Buechner asserts, true vocation joins self and service when your deep gladness meets the world's deep need. This is not a selfish stance. Rather, it is one that positions you to be the gifts that God created.

Jump in... the water is fine! I hope you will find me someday at the confluence of the LeSueur Creek and the Minnesota River... with my grandson, a can of worms, and a cane pole telling stories about my grandfather, my mother, his father, and Augustana. Someday he will be telling stories about the tributaries to his river. The cycle continues....  
Amen

**MORNING WORSHIP**  
**Monday, April 26, 2004**

**Prelude**                    “Carillon for a Joyful Day”                    George McKay  
**Welcome/Announcements**  
**Invocation**

**Call to Worship**                    [based on Psalm 46, Psalm 1 and Amos 5]  
L: There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God.  
**C: God is in the midst of the city, it shall not be moved.**  
L: God will help us.  
**C: God, help us know that you are with us.**  
L: And God will raise up new life among us, like trees planted by streams of water.  
**C: Let righteousness flow among us, waterfalls of justice and cascades of joy. Amen.**

**HYMN**                    “Shall we Gather by the River”                    WOV 690, vv. 1-2

**Scripture**                    Ps. 26: 4; Rev. 22: 1-5; Is. 33: 20-22

**Sermon**                    John Clementson, Education

**Anthem**                    “Down to the River to Pray”                    Faculty/Staff Choir  
From “O Brother, Where Art Thou?” Arr. Sheldon Curry

**Prayers**  
**Lord’s Prayer**

**Benediction & Dismissal**

**Postlude**                    “I’ll Fly Away”                    Albert E. Brumley  
Faculty/Staff Choir

**CHAPEL SCHEDULE**

**TUESDAY**                    Worship, 10 am - Sinai Praise Band  
- Outreach Luau - 7:30 pm - chapel (all outreach members are welcome!!!)

**WEDNESDAY**                    Holy Communion, 10 am - Muriel Larson, Nursing;  
Collegiate Bell Choir  
- CIA - 9 pm - Chris Bergwald, SF Cath. Diocese,  
speaking on gay marriage

**THURSDAY**                    “Journey Together Faithfully” - Homosexuality  
Discussion - 10 am - 3-1 room

**FRIDAY**                    Worship, 10 am