

Augustana College
Chapel of Reconciliation

“Awake . . . Be kind to your sleeping heart”

Julia Bennett

24 Feb 2010

Greetings faculty, students and friends.

It has been my privilege to greet you from this pulpit several times in my twenty-one years at Augustana. Yet, times change and I with them. This summer, I will follow my husband west where he will begin his work with the Boise Philharmonic Orchestra. At the end of this academic term, I am retiring from full-time teaching to explore new creative endeavors. To paraphrase scripture (can I do that in church, Anne?) “To everything there is a season . . . A time to grade and be graded; a time to test and a time to play; a time to orient and a time to commence.” My friends, my commencement from Augustana is imminent. Welcome to my senior sermon.

Like any member of the graduating class, I am equal parts sentiment, elation, sorrow and terror. The decision to leave my wonderful, quirky, brilliant Lutheran community has not been easy, ‘ya sure ya betcha.’ I keep having flashbacks – teaching Fargo with Swanson to seniors who were sure “we don’ talk like dat dere” – Nesiba banging on the old Social Science bathroom wall (with which with my office wall was shared), and yelling “hey, Pachoud, guess who’s in here!” Of the kids I saw come in the world who are now college-bound (Abbie Blank Libra, stop that!), the smell of baked sweat, greasepaint, dust and duct tape rising up even as the Little Theatre fell to the ground. Of the sacred silence of our empty dark theatres after everyone had headed home. Of watching students teach students with games and exercises that I’d taught them before. Everything comes full circle with time, and two decades is my small measure. I am a part of this institution’s history and culture just as it is a part of me. There is so very much here to cherish and even more I will miss and mourn. Leaving you will not be easy.

Yet I challenge you – when will I – or you or we -- ever be ready to let go of what we know to meet the unknown? What leave-taking ever is on our clock? It's not that we are not experienced in goodbyes – every day we experience the passage of expectations, of experiences, of the familiar. Some of those crossings require only a small dose of trust. Some will take a larger leap of blind faith that the ground will rise to catch us. Each day a thousand deaths – and more still to come. My friend Daniel Webster (whom I adore) tells me that transfiguration is a dramatic change in appearance, especially one that reveals great beauty, spirituality, or magnificence. We are in a time of transfiguration, you and I. Certainly we see the spiritual, but the beauty? Magnificence? These are harder to see and even harder to cherish. We Vikings are tender, tired and sore with grieving. Too many deaths we say. Too much illness. Too much. How many times in the past months have you asked yourself, how can I possibly get through this? How do I get from the here I know and love to one I can only see darkly? God, that canyon you have placed before me - the leap of faith from the known to the unknown- is vast and improbable. Am I strong enough? Are we done yet?

'Will you take this cup from me?' – that ancient question that is so deeply embedded in this dark time of Lent. We've asked it through tears, through laughter, on Caring Bridge, in the dark of night, in secret prayer, over conversations all across campus. When can we rest? And there is the need to impose narrative sense - Why? Why him? Why her? Why me? Why now? In the face of so much change, we are holding each other more closely these days, anchoring ourselves in the familiar, hoping to survive until we get to see the beauty and magnificence. Yet It's tempting to disappear into the caress of sleep. To hibernate, to stop, to insulate ourselves. Still, almost every truth literature tells us that the answer isn't in the oblivion of the unconscious. The divine prescription? Wake up, beloveds. Arise and awake.

Abraham Maslow, noted psychologist, once asked 'from what grief would you save those you love?' Would you save them from the loss of a pet, a child, death, their own dying? Would you deny them the opportunity to be cut deep, to "ferment and season as few human or divine

ingredients can.” No. You would not, as difficult as that choice is. The Vedas – a precursor to Buddhist scripture – tell us that suffering will be. End of story. We can’t escape it. None are immune – and, beloveds, that is the point. Because it is that “something missing in our hearts” that can point us to God. Grief—our perception of suffering—makes our need of the divine absolutely clear. As Hafiz puts it

Don't surrender your loneliness

So quickly, Let it cut more deep.

Let it ferment and season you.

As few human or divine ingredients can.

Something missing in my heart tonight,

Has made my eyes so soft,

My voice so tender.

My need of God absolutely clear.

Coleman Barks, Translator

Whether it’s to our bodies as they age, an illness, outdated relationships, or a career identity – every death, small and large, calls to be honored. Death is the absence by which we mark life. In each passage terrifying or wonderful, we are called to life and life everlasting. By being present and a servant to the most difficult, the most precious, the most human moments, the sweetness of grace can more sharply arise. Be warned: This stuff isn’t for the feint of heart. To be transfigured – to die to what has been, to become your most magnificent, most true human self - takes a gentle but firm hand. Being asleep is seductive. But your life is in the land of the present, beloved. Embrace that precious, prickly and delicious challenge of presence. Hold your heart gently but firmly and be assured in your tranfiguration - the presence of the One God will hold us with a grace that surpasses all understanding.

Awake my dear.

Be kind to your sleeping heart.

Take it out into the vast field of light and let it breathe.

Poetry by Rumi (Coleman Barks, translator)

Music by David Wilcox, Out Beyond Ideas

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

“REVIVE AT 5” - All are welcome to worship on Sunday evenings at 5 pm in the chapel. We will be singing Holden Evening Prayer and celebrating Holy Eucharist.

SERVING THE BANQUET - Campus Ministry will be serving the Banquet on Monday, March 1st. We are in need of many more workers!! Please sign up for one of the shifts on the Narthex table.

CHAPEL STAFF APPLICATIONS - Applications for chapel staff for the next school year will be available on **March 1st**. If you are considering applying for staff, please see Carol in the chapel office. Voting for chapel president will be **Fri., Mar. 26th and Sun., Mar. 28th**. Interviews will be held **Mar. 25th and 26th** for staff, and the announcement for staff will be sometime the week of the 29th.

CHAPEL SCHEDULE:

Friday (26th) - Worship, 10 am - Will Dietzler, Sr. Spkr

Sunday (28th) - Dist. Scholar/Family Weekend Worship, 9 am
Evening Worship - “Revive at 5” - 5 pm - Prism Outreach team

Monday (1st) - Morning Prayer, 10 am - Margot Nelson, Nurs.

Tuesday (2nd)- Roman Catholic Mass, 10 am

Wednesday (3rd)Holy Communion, 10 am - Jetty Duffy-Matzner