Augustana College
Chapel of Reconciliation

“Called to Teach”

Julie Ashworth

22 April 2013

Every Easter when I hear today’s scripture being read from John 20:11-18 where we see Mary weeping at the tomb of her son...and try to fathom the unimaginable...she has been through the most horrific experience a mother could have...witnessing her beloved son being beaten and crucified.....and yet when she realizes he has risen, she exclaims: Rabbouni~ TEACHER...this always astounds me! and I am in awe that her first word spoken to her risen son is Rabbouni...instead of exclaiming her son’s name: Jesus or crying out...my son...she says Rabbouni...TEACHER...this is her most endearing name for her son...so, this always confirms for me why I believe that teaching is the most vital calling there is!

When Pastor Paul asked me to speak about being called to teach, he stated in a follow-up email to me:

“My hope is that each conversation will help folks think about vocation concretely, in all the specifics of serving real people in real places. . . . both the thrill and anguish of that.”

A life committed to teaching IS both thrill and anguish...it is thrilling when your students succeed and you experience powerful teachable moments that keep you coming back day after day. But there are many times that teaching is also full of anguish.

The “call to teach” IS also both an incredible opportunity and solemn responsibility as it is multidimensional and complex...it is~ (what I tell my students)...messy work. Research tells us that K-12 Classroom teachers make more than a 1000 instructional decisions a day......multiple planning decisions, responding to individual student’s answers and actions, how to prompt and probe their students, how to differentiate for the learning styles and the abilities in their classrooms...how to affirm and edify each student, considering how each action and decision impacts the learning environment in their classroom...making these hundreds of decisions each day is one of the reasons teaching is mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually exhausting!
Another tenet I share in my courses time and time again is that Teaching is relational!

When you are called to teach, you are called to seek encounters with those that are different than you and you do not always know where those relationships will lead... throughout the years of teaching, I have encountered students from many challenging life situations. Before I came to Augustana College I taught at Hawthorne Elementary which is a very diverse school with (what the field describes as high needs)...97% poverty, over 60% ethnic diversity with immigrant and refugee students from over 30 different countries, as well as a high population of Native American students and students with disabilities...a school where the majority of students come from very limited resources. One story I would like to share with you today is about a third grade Lakota boy, James Bluebird...when James came to my classroom his father was in prison for sexually abusing his children. James refused to do any work, he refused to talk to me or interact at any level with the other kids. He was sullen and angry and solitary. I tried every strategy I could to reach him and connect with him, but much to my disappointment, frustration and even heartache I could not inspire him. James did have a gift...he was a very talented artist...and I would allow him to draw much of the time when he should have been working. This was a student that caused much anguish each day as I struggled to teach him. Knowing that my students were unable to buy gifts for their family members at Christmas time I laid out materials for my students to use if they wanted to make gifts for their families. As I was cleaning up the last day of class before Christmas break, I found a handmade card on my desk...that said...Us KIDS are the LUCKYST kids to have you... it was my most treasured Christmas gift that year. I have kept that card for all these years...for it reminds me when I need it the most ...that along with anguish in teaching there is the thrill of teaching. I had no idea I had connected with James. I looked forward to seeing him after Christmas break with renewed spirit but sadly, he didn’t return. As often happened at Hawthorne, I didn’t have a chance to even say goodbye...more Anguish...then 15 years later while here at Augie I received a phone call from James...he had successfully completed a career in the Army and wanted to tell me that he had just become a PE teacher and that he was married and his wife was an art teacher. We had a wonderful conversation...it was THRILLING to know he had overcome such overwhelming odds in his life and was now a teacher!
Dr. Bob Kiner, former Chair of the Education Dept. here at Augie, “called” me both literally and figuratively, to come to Augustana and prepare future teachers. He insisted that I would have the opportunity to impact hundreds and eventually thousands of students instead of just my classroom of 25 children each year. I could prepare future Augie teachers, (who I fondly call, my Augie babies,) to go out to their classrooms and have an impact on their students’ lives and this would continue to multiply. I loved being in the classroom more than any other teacher I knew; so my first reaction was why would I leave my classroom of students at Hawthorne Elementary. This is where I felt I was supposed to be and was needed. I was committed to teaching and learning with these students and families that are marginalized. However, Kiner persisted (as those of you who know him~ know he had his velvet sledgehammer~ a way of twisting your arm) so he kept encouraging me to consider applying for the position of an education professor. After intense discussion with my husband and close colleagues I spent a great deal of time in prayer and discernment listening ~ this time...to a more important CHAIR of EDUCATION...the MOST important CHAIR of EDUCATION in my life...GOD! I truly did feel called to be a disciple...to prepare future teachers...and to do this radically different and radically better than I had been prepared! I knew in my heart if I wanted to actualize real reform in education then it needed to start at this level...preparing future teachers to be passionate teachers, advocates for their students and change agents! I continue to experience both thrill and anguish in this teaching setting as much as I did in my elementary classrooms. There are 8 Augie grads, Augie babies, teaching at Hawthorne Elementary now and I have the privilege of spending time with them in their classrooms as they experience the thrill and anguish of teaching.

As I reflected on my decision to be a disciple...I considered...What is a Disciple? The Biblical definition is: A lifetime learner and follower of Jesus Christ who surrenders his or her life to God’s mission.

So for me the CALL to teach is more than a position, a contract, a job, even a career. It is surrendering my life to God’s mission. Since I am in a relationship with Jesus Christ, this is a call to discipleship.

Jesus invited his twelve men to follow Him, not just so they could know Him and go to heaven one day, but also so that He could transform them into His own
image. This is how He knew His teaching would continue to spread after His resurrection and ascension. He called them, trained them, and loved them. Then they called others, trained others and loved others like Jesus had with them—even to the point of death—so that HIS message would continue to go forth to the ends of the earth. Jesus “multiplied” Himself through building relationships with these twelve men. The invitation was to follow Him, know Him intimately and learn from Him first-hand, then to go out and follow His example as they related to and trained others. Ultimately, this is the same invitation we have today when we answer our calling... As a teacher, as a Christian who is called by my faith, I prepare future teachers to go forth by building relationships with them!

When Jesus said, Come, Follow Me... I don’t think Jesus was saying, “Take some time to think about it... and get back to me.” He isn’t giving me the opportunity to negotiate what I deem fair...His call is to leave everything and come now. The invitation is a command that, once accepted, requires full obedience. Again...it is no easy task...and it is messy work...and in my experience...answering this call also requires 1000 decisions a day!

When Jesus called his disciples...did that mean that Andrew, Simon Peter, James and John had no choice but to obey Christ? Did they have to follow Jesus and become fishers of men because it was a command? No, they chose to obey. But it’s important to note that once they obeyed, Jesus sets the conditions of being His disciple. The one receiving the invitation doesn’t decide what being a disciple will cost or require—the one issuing the invitation does. Jesus’ invitation to follow Him was ~ and is ~ an all-or-nothing invitation—come here and come now! There was a cost for the call then... just as there is a cost for each of us in our lives today when we answer that call. When I strive to answer that call on a daily basis...do I succeed everyday as a disciple? No, I do not...but the good news is that Jesus also determined the blessing that His disciples would receive for their obedience. There is a purpose in the call—and it is a God-given purpose and there is the blessing in the call...a promise of life everlasting, for our God is a God of life, of hope and promise.

In his book, Becoming Human, Jean Vanier who is a philosopher, writer, religious and moral leader declares: To be a teacher is to be a pilgrim sailing on a daily basis to a new and unknown holy land. It is to be an explorer traveling through uncharted and sometimes stormy seas, to
God continues to call me as a teacher to continue on my journey and he gives me daily hope and blessings to continue through both the thrill and anguish as I witness my Augie students become teachers sailing through their new and unknown holy lands.

On the last day of my Education TLC class, Teaching, Learning and Connecting in Today’s classrooms I always share this reading with my students:

Teacher: The word itself creates a rush of associations. Perhaps it brings fond memories of that special first grade teacher who helped you unlock the mysteries of reading and writing. The music teacher who convinced you that you were good enough to audition for the solo in band or chorus. The algebra teacher who met with you after class until you could actually apply the principles of the Pythagorean theorem to questions on the SATs. The science teacher who helped get you a scholarship for college.

The simple word teacher seems to have emotion built into it, along with strong feelings of respect, gratitude and often, love. Teachers, more than any other adults, except parents and family members, shape the ideas and values of our society’s most precious resource...its children. They belong to the largest profession in the world (some thirty million strong) and it is no exaggeration to say that their work directs, if not creates, the future. And yet there are not many statues of teachers in public parks, not many stories passed down from generation to generation about important teachers, not many teachers among the list of heroes to whom our collective culture turns for inspiration. Prestige is for teachers isn’t often high and salaries are definitely not.

So why do teachers do it? Why do they devote long and unpaid hours to the class planning, grading paper correcting, and impromptu student counseling? The truth is, great teachers have a mysterious and beautiful calling. They undertake the job of inspiring their students and providing the tools they need to master our complex world. Why?? Because they believe that education liberates the individual. It explains the society we live in and helps create a better one. It is the
foundation of freedom and the portal to a life full of challenge, community spirit, and most important of all, meaning. Teaching is more than an occupation...it is a calling...it is a way of life.

It is my way of life... and I thank God that through the power of my faith and my trust in God that as his disciple I do what I love...and I love what I do.

As we contemplate the enduring invitation to be disciples, especially in the midst of last weeks’ events in our country, I will conclude by sharing a favorite quote of mine by Cesar Chavez: "It is possible to become discouraged about the injustice we see everywhere. But God did not promise us that the world would be humane and just. He gives us the gift of life and allows us to choose the way we will use our limited time on earth. It is an awesome opportunity." ~

When I graduated from Augie many years ago I graduated with a degree in elementary education, special education and deaf education. I have always found sign language to be an incredible powerful visual way to communicate. I direct the two children’s choirs at my church, Asbury Methodist...this is my 33rd year! I often teach my children the signs for anthems we sing in church and my children often teach our congregation how to sign. I chose to sing one of my favorite Hymns to sing today, Hear I am Lord and I am going to teach you the signs for the chorus and ask you to put down your hymnal after each verse and sign the chorus.
MORNING WORSHIP
Monday, April 22, 2013

Prelude “Lord Whose Love in Humble Service” Anna Vorhes, Harp

Welcome and Announcements

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 “We are Called” ELW #720

Scripture John 20:11-18

Sermon “Called to Teach” Dr. Julie Ashworth

Hymn “Here I Am, Lord” ELW #574 Ruth Young ’16, ASL interpreter

Lord’s Prayer

Benediction

Postlude “Earth and all Stars” Anna Vorhes, Harp

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

RECEPTION - Today, April 22 from 3-5 pm you are invited to thank Carol LaCroix and bid her well at a party in the chapel narthex. Carol is retiring after 15 years in the chapel and more than 20 years of service to Augustana. Everyone--students, staff, alums, friends--are welcome!

MONDAYS FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE SEMESTER will focus on vocation in an Easter series we are calling, “Called to Live.” Pastor Paul will begin the series next Monday, then Professors Julie Ashworth, Joel Johnson, Jenny Gubbels, and Patrick Hicks 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. Students interested in attending the May 24-27 Taize weekend at Red Shirt Table please sign up in the narthex, or speak to Pr. Paul.

BREAD FOR THE WORLD’S National Gathering will be held June 8-11, 2013, in 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., 4-24 Holy Communion, 10 am - Pr. Bill Tesch, SD ELCA Synod
Fri., 4-26 Morning Worship, 10 am - Anna Olson, Sr. Spkr.
Sun., 4-28 Morning Worship, 11 am - Pr. Paul
Mon., 4-29 Morning worship, 10 am - Joel Johnson; Augie Choir
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