

**Augustana College
Chapel of Reconciliation**

See the Wonder

Katie Barth

8 February 2008

Sometimes we get asked questions in life that we never forget. Or at least we get asked questions whose answers we never fully forget. This fall I was sitting in Janet Blank-Libra's journalism 315 class, blissfully unaware of one such type of question that was heading my way. I had even heard this question from her before; but, its force hadn't sunk in with the same stomach-punching gusto as it had on this unassuming fall day.

Janet posed a situation to us in our Law and Ethics of the Press class that paralleled a similar question asked of several journalists at a forum aired on public television. The gist of the question scratched at what a journalist would do if he or she received information that would affect the safety of their country's soldiers during a time of war. The question was seeped in ethical journalistic standards and pulled at one's heartstrings. Looking back to that fall day, I have few other memories of what the question included. And in all honesty, the question itself isn't what it important. Rather it's the answers that the question led me to, and the ways in which the answers morphed into an entire way of living my life. I realized that day how much easier it was for me to become territorial than tolerant. It was an ugly revelation.

In a freakish Twilight Zone way, I sat in Janet's class and remembered something my pastor had preached about just this past summer. I don't remember now what the sermon was completely about. But the thing I remember most clearly was my pastor singing. She stood at the pulpit and sang "God Bless the USA." She changed the lyrics, though, to "God Bless the Whole Wide World."

It was one of the most powerful experiences to be in worship and in the middle of the sermon listen to my pastor sing. I was moved by the simplicity of the song. God bless the world. I felt like suddenly a curtain had been flung open in an old room, and I was left stunned my eyes dazzling in the brightness while watching the dust dance to the

ground – the whole kit and caboodle. I was stunned. The sheer simplicity of her words shattered the territorial snobbery that for the first time, I was becoming aware of in myself.

Whether it was secretly snubbing USF students, because come on they aren't Vikings, or booing an opposing team at one basketball game I've been too. It is too easy we weave a web of safety around ourselves and believe that we are right because the alternative seems too frightening to face.

Sitting in Janet's class that day I remembered what my pastor had sung about. And I realized how polarized I was. When threatened, I looked at the world through a defined reality of "us" and "them." The truth is that we are all brothers and sisters. We might live in different countries, speak different languages and follow different faith journeys, but we all are together. It's more than God Bless the USA, it's about God blessing all of us who need guidance. That day in Janet's class I realized, in a very roundabout way, the power of wonder.

One of the Scripture lessons I read was about the parable of Jesus healing a crippled woman. In the parable, the leader of the synagogue finds fault with Jesus' work because it is done on the Sabbath day. Over and over he appeals to the crowd of Jesus' wrong doings. Instead of reveling in the miraculous and divine works of Jesus, the synagogue leader criticizes Jesus' good deeds. The man is afraid of the unknown. He sees only one perspective and anything new or different is a cause for alarm.

How different would the parable have been if the man had wondered at Jesus? A sense of wonder allows us to look at a person different from ourselves and appreciate them. There is a power in wondering. We need to wonder at each other, for in that sense of wonder we will find a love for our fellow brothers and sisters. Wonder breaks down the barrier between "us" and "them" and unites people in sincere love.

The Scripture lesson also includes the image of the mustard seed, which is one of my favorite images. My mom always told me that good things come in small packages. But I really love the image of the mustard seed because it symbolizes wonder. How can something so big come from something so small?

We cannot possibly see all the ways that the Holy Spirit is working among us and through us. And yet, when we wonder, just for a moment we push aside a thin-veil that

separates us from all beyond that is divine and true. Pushing aside this veil and allowing ourselves to wonder and marvel at one another allows us to love. If we love each other sincerely, when threatened, we will not be territorial but tolerant.

If we are ever faced with an uncertain situation or asked a rather difficult question that sends our ethical compass spinning, we should embrace wonder.

God has placed a little mustard seed inside of us. God has blessed each of us with immeasurable grace that is worthy of wonder. When we wonder, we crack open that little mustard seed inside the hearts of our brothers and sisters. We let our love soak up the goodness that God has blessed upon their spirits. In our own hearts, we sow a place for tolerance, justice and forgiveness.

We must wonder to love.

We must love sincerely to have faith.

And in having faith we will forever be on the quest to find truth, so that when we find it, we can wonder at it.

