

**Augustana College
Chapel of Reconciliation**

Kristen Wilcox

29 Feb 2008

It had been one of those days. Having woken up late, for the third day in a row, I missed my shower, for the third day in a row, and had barely enough time to throw some clothes on, grab a handful of fruit and a roll and run -through the rain- the ten blocks to my trolley stop, just managing to shove my way onto the crowded car. During the 45-minute ride to the school where I was teaching in Quito, Ecuador, I brooded and grumbled to myself about my inability to be on time, the myriad things I needed to get done and had been putting off, how badly a steamy, crowded trolley could smell, how slowly, if at all, my Spanish was improving, the increasingly greasy state of my hair, and more. By the time I arrived at my stop and started the walk to school, I was thoroughly discouraged, disgruntled and wet.

Needless to say, this was not the best state in which to spend the day teaching a roomful of rowdy pre-teens. In fact, things just went from bad to worse: because of the rain we couldn't have much of a recess, (my students' favorite part of the day,) and the kids found a seemingly endless variety of "creative" ways to release their pent up energy. After spending the day attempting to stop fights, soothe hurt feelings, keep textbooks intact and pencils out of ears, I was at my wits' end with just a half-hour to go. Finishing explaining to Teresa why she could *not* borrow the paints "for a little while," I turned around to find Fausto and Aureliano holding Jaime's head – *in a plastic bag*. Shouting something about death, (it wasn't clear, at this point, if I was explaining or proffering the threat,) I rescued Jaime and sent everyone home a few minutes early.

Blinking back tears on the trolley home, I started the walk back to my house, thinking about what a failure I was. Shuffling along under my umbrella, I stopped at a street corner and thought that at *least* I was managing to stay relatively dry in the downpour. Just then, in a moment of *profound* irony, a car drove through the large puddle at my feet and, yes, completely drenched me: head to toe, down to my

bones. Utterly defeated, I made it home, left most of my soaked things in the laundry room, managed to bite my tongue at my host mother's "well you're wet," and collapsed on my bed, exhausted and lost in the depth of my own failings. As the negativity spiraled ever downward, I found myself focusing inward, expanding from just a bad day to a *very* long list of faults and mistakes. Finally, needing something, anything, I grabbed my Bible and flipped through it, landing on Isaiah 43.

By the seventh verse I was weeping, having found powerful release from the cycle of self-hatred that had enveloped me. After I calmed down, I started to think about what had happened and what I had learned, as well as to go over, again and again, those verses from the 43rd chapter of Isaiah. There have been many occasions, since that, um, wet day in Ecuador, to return to Isaiah's words, and now, nearly a year later, I think I've managed to lump all that I have gained, so far, from these verses into two main categories: "the who" and "the what."

"The who," sad to say, does not refer to the popular English rock band, but rather to the fact that I have found an identity, a sense of *who* I am, and perhaps who we are, in these few verses of Isaiah's. First, Isaiah tells us that we are original creations of God's; not only were we created by God, but, Isaiah says, also formed. I am currently taking a ceramics class, and I can tell you that forming anything, other than by sheer accident, takes attention, care and dedication. Second, we read that we have been redeemed, which Merriam Webster defines as, variously: "to free from what distresses or harms, to free from captivity by payment of ransom, to extricate from or help to overcome something detrimental, to release from blame or debt, to free from the consequence of sin, to change for the better, to reform, repair, restore and to make worthwhile." It doesn't stop here, though: God knows our names and uses them to tell us, simply, "You are mine." Who am I? I am God's. Who are you? You are God's.

What does it mean to be God's? It means that "the Holy One of Israel, your Savior," sees you and me as precious, even honors us. It means that we are assured of God's presence and help through all the waters, rivers and fires of life. It means we have been designed to glorify God. Best of all, belonging to God means claiming the identity of beloved. God loves you, and me, and that means we have

immeasurable worth, just as we are. When the world tells you, again and again, that you will never be good enough, and when you start to listen, to tell yourself you will never be enough, remember who you really are: you are a claimed, redeemed, named, loved child of God.

So, that's "the who" in Isaiah 43. (Maybe that was the band The Who's inspiration, as well: *who* knows? ..) Sorry. As for the "what" aspect, I should probably warn you that, as a senior at Augie, I've been thoroughly indoctrinated with *the* capstone question: "how then shall we live?" and it's managed to find its way into my sermon. The "what" category, for me, is what I, and we, should do in response to the new identity we've found. Knowing who we are is half of the battle; knowing what we should do is the other half. I've discovered this because, when I entered Augie as freshmen, people were always asking me who I was: was I a musician (and did I want to join the band)? Was I an artist (and did I want to write for the paper)? Was I an athlete (and did I want to work at the Elmen)? Was I an adventurer (and did I want to ..never mind.) Now that I am preparing to leave Augie, however, the question has changed: what are you going to do next year? What do you want to do with your life? What will you do to support me in my retirement? (That's just my parents, but still, it comes up.)

What does Isaiah 43 have to say about the "what?" First, we are told, before anything else, "Fear not." Fear not, for you have been redeemed. Fear not, for you will never be alone. Fear not, for the rivers will not overwhelm you and the flames will not consume you. Fear not. Whatever it is that scares you, that makes you hesitate, that keeps you up at night; you are freed from it. It is clear, though, that this freedom comes with a purpose: you are freed to "bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth." Our identity has liberated us from our self-centeredness and allowed us to focus outwards, and now we are presented with a clear object for that focus: God's sons and daughters around the world. We are to bring all God's children to God, to an intimate, life-giving and life-changing knowledge of God's unfathomable love.

Personally, I find the global perspective of Isaiah 43 to be irresistible: "I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you. I will say to the north, 'Give them up,' and to the

south, 'Do not withhold.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth." God's children live in all corners of the world, aching to know the love God offers, and we are called to carry that love, to the north and the south, the east and the west. When the world tells you, again and again, that you must spend your time pursuing material possessions you'll never have enough of, and when you start to listen, to tell yourself you'll be a success only when you can afford the latest trend, remember what you are really called to do: to share the freedom and love you've found with others. God's love shows us who we are, frees us from our negativity and selfishness and reminds us where our focus should be: allowing the love we know to move us to love God's children, wherever we find them ..even if it means missing your morning shower, trudging through the rain and grabbing plastic bags off people's heads. Amen.

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

UNITY PRAYER - Cru and UTIC offer prayer for the community every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 7:00am in the Back Alley and Sundays at 9:00pm at the Valhalla Theme House (1000 W. 28th St.). All members of the Augustana community are invited to attend.

SERVING THE BANQUET - Campus Ministry is sponsoring a team to serve the Banquet (The local soup kitchen) on Monday, March. 10th. There are two shifts that need workers: the afternoon shift to prepare the food (2-4:30 pm) and the evening shift to serve (5:15-8 pm) There is a sign-up sheet on the Narthex table. Please consider helping with this worthwhile project!

TEN THOUSAND VILLAGES - Next Saturday March 8,2008 will be College Student Day at Ten Thousand Villages. We will give friendship bracelets to the first 100 customers. Ten Thousand Villages is a not for profit Fair Trade Organization. Stop by and hear stories about artisans that are being paid a fair wage and providing a bright future for their families.

OUTREACH LEADERS MEETING - Tues., Mar. 4th -
Youth leaders - 5:30 pm, Worship - 6:00 pm

WORSHIP AT ST. DYSMAS - For those who filled out clearance forms, we will be meeting in the chapel Narthex. At 5:30 on Thurs., Mar. 6th. If you can drive for the carpool, please bring your car to the Commons Circle and we will all leave together. **We need to be at the prison by 6 pm.**

CHAPEL CALENDAR

Sun. (2 nd)	Dist. Schol. Worship, 9 am - Pr. Paul Worship, 11 am - Born Anew Outreach Team
Mon. (3 rd)	Worship, 10 am - Karen Mahan, Ethics & Educ.
Tues. (4 th)	Catholic Mass , 10 am - Fr. Joe Vogel - Outreach Lders Mtngs - 5:30 Yth., 6:00 Wor.
Wed. (5 th)	Holy Communion, 10 am - Mark Braun
Thurs. (6 th)	Worship at St. Dysmas
Fri. (7 th)	Worship, 10 am - Jackie Strey, Sr. Spkr.
Sun. (9 th)	Worship, 11 am - Pr. Paul