

Augustana College
Chapel of Reconciliation

Wanderings in the Desert

Loren Koepsell

September 24, 2003

Deuteronomy 2:7 The Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He has watched over your journey through this vast desert. These forty years the Lord your God has been with you and you have not lacked anything.

For forty years, after the Israelites left Egypt, they wandered in the desert before being delivered to the “promised land.” It was forty years ago this month that I started elementary school. Many would argue that, much like the Israelites, I have been wandering ever since.

Let me give you a few pieces of my path so you can have an appreciation of this wandering: Right after high school I went to a business college and picked up a 2-year degree in data processing (computing). I took a job out of state and almost immediately started taking night courses at a different school. Two years later I had a job transfer to another city and began taking courses at two different colleges simultaneously. Over the next two years I added a 2-year degree in business as well as 4-year degrees in data processing and business. I then switched jobs moved to another state and began work on my MBA. So, in the stretch of about seven years I had been at five institutions in four cities working on five different degrees.

It didn't stop there. I had a full-time job, but after completing my MBA I took a part-time job, at an institution here in Sioux Falls, teaching night classes. I did that for a couple of years before I moved over to Augustana to teach night classes. Shortly after I started teaching at Augie I began taking classes again - working toward a 4-year accounting degree. After a couple of years of teaching at Augustana, I took a full-time position here that was a combination administrator/instructor. I continued on with my own Augie course work. I took a six-year sabbatical from my Augie course work and picked up a doctorate in higher ed administration. But, I came back and finished my accounting degree at Augie - class of 98. At that point my wife said she thought that was enough education for a while. So, off and on for 35 years I was a formal student. Now, that's wandering. And, somewhere along the way people stopped worrying about what I was going to do when I finished college - although I can't honestly remember when.

I say all of this, not to illustrate what I have done, but to hopefully provide some level of comfort to those of you who are not yet sure what you want to do. Guess what? I am not yet sure what I want to do.

How many of you freshmen and sophomores picked a major simply so you would have an answer for the dozens of times you were asked “what are you going to study in college?” or “Have you decided what you are going to do yet?” Or how many of you that haven't declared a

major have had to answer the question “How can you afford to go to Augustana if you don’t even know what you want to do?”

Or, let me move to the seniors. Is your wandering just about over, or is it just beginning? In a few short months you are going to have a degree, but then what? Then you have to go out and find work. I am sure many of you don’t have a clue what it is you want to do. Most of us don’t. Dr. Mullin, in our History Department, is the only person I know that decided in elementary school that he was going to be a history professor, became one, and is still at it. Us mere mortals change our mind dozens of times.

Why should this be a problem? As long as we are being productive citizens, why should we be embarrassed to say we don’t have the next 40 years of our lives mapped out? That is what college is all about - discovering. Discovering what it is that we enjoy. Discovering who we are. Discovering what it is that we may want to do - or just as importantly, what it is we don’t want to do. Andy Granatelli is quoted as saying “When you make a success of something, it’s not work. It’s a way of life. You enjoy yourself because you are making your contribution to the world.” That’s all we can ask of you is to make a contribution to the world. Like the little boy who was walking along a beach littered with starfish. He was picking them up one at a time and throwing them back into the ocean. A man came by and asked him what he was doing. He said he was throwing the starfish back in the water so they wouldn’t die. The man asked him if he thought he could possibly make a difference. He picked up another starfish and threw it into the water, and said “for that one I did.” Sometimes we only have to help one starfish to make a difference.

You should strive to find work and service in areas that will be personally fulfilling. But, you must remember that you also have responsibilities. You cannot take your pleasures at someone else’s expense. Luke 12:48 - From everyone who has been **given much, much** will be demanded. Everyone in this room has been given much, but it comes with high expectations. It is your responsibility to not only take the pleasures of your gifts, but also the responsibilities.

During the time the Israelites were wandering through the desert they often felt that God had abandoned them. If you will recall, at one point they built a golden calf to worship. We have a lot of our own golden calves. For some it’s alcohol or drugs, for others it’s sex, and for still others it’s money—things we turn to when we don’t feel things are going our way - our golden calves. Generally, the satisfaction or relief we get from these golden calves is very short-lived. They are not a substitute to becoming a responsible citizen and making our contribution to the world. They are short term fixes that often leave us feeling empty and insecure. Anne Morrow Lindbergh said “The most exhausting thing in life is being insecure. That is why so much social life is exhausting.” We need to find ways to get past our insecurities so that we do not need our golden calves and so that we do not become so exhausted.

Don’t let your college majors and your career decisions be exhausting. Keep an open mind. Stay aware of what is around you. Look for opportunities. Often times the questions will be answered for you. If it turns out you made the wrong career decision, don’t be afraid to change. It is much more important that you be a productive citizen and add something to society than it is that you

have your future mapped out.

Us Congressman Claude Pepper said “Life is like riding a bicycle. You don’t fall off unless you stop pedaling.” So, my best advice to you is find something you enjoy, act responsibly, avoid worshiping the golden calves, make a difference in the world, and keep pedaling.

HOLY COMMUNION

Wednesday, September 24, 2003

Prelude

“Holy Manna” - David Cherwien

Invocation

Confession

L: Let us pray that God may guide us

C: Good and gracious God, help us admit when we have lost our way.

Give us light that we may see the darkness within as well as around us.

Renew in us the promise of your abundant mercy, steadfast love and forgiving grace, that we may be free.

Absolution

Scripture

Deuteronomy 2:7

Sermon

“Wanderings in the Desert”

Dr. Loren Koepsell
Vice President of Finance

HYMN

“God, Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens”

LBW 463

Intercessions

Words of Institution

Lord's Prayer

Distribution

Blessing & Benediction

Postlude “God, Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens” - Wilbur Held

FALL BREAK SERVICE LEARNING - Pine Ridge Indian

Reservation...Oct. 26-29, 2003. In a spirit of accompaniment we want to know our neighbors! We'll work on a Habitat for Humanity house, assist with the after school program for children, and meet folks from the community to know culture, neighborhood and bridges of and barriers to understanding. Cost is \$40. **Registration will open on Sept. 28.** Limited to 12 students. Questions: talk to Pr. Paul

“A WARM WELCOME TO THE FATHER'S HOUSE” - A time of song, prayer and Q&A on the Our Father, the Lord's prayer. How do we pray, Why do we pray? Does God really hear my prayers?...led by Shane Stevens, CIA advisor. All are welcome; Wed. Sept. 24 - 9 pm - **TONIGHT!!** - Chapel. Fellowship and food to follow.