

Augustana College
Chapel of Reconciliation

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Augustana prides itself greatly in the number of students that are able to travel abroad during their studies here. I have been one of those lucky travelers. Many of you know that this last summer, I was given the wonderful opportunity to travel to Norway for seven weeks. I, along with Thad Titze, was incredibly blessed to receive a full-ride scholarship to study at the University of Oslo, and it was, without a doubt one of the best experiences of my short life. While there, I took classes with hundreds of students from about a hundred countries. The cultures and peoples swirled around us in a daze, but the knowledge we gained about the diverse world is truly invaluable.

I attended dozens of lectures, wandered the halls of many museums, rode countless subway lines, and experienced a country I have come to love. The warmth of the Norwegian people, the beauty of their land, and the inescapable character of their country will always be with me.

And yet, this is not a travel-log. I'm not here to talk about my day to day life in Norway, although I'd *love* to do that at another time. Ask me about it, and I'd be more than happy to share. No, instead, we gather today to apply God's word to our lives and expect the Lord to show us the way ahead.

Today's readings paint, at times, a very grim picture of how we should respond to sin. And yet, at other points, these passages describe God's overflowing mercy, a longing to reconcile us with Him. This contradiction is troubling and yet necessary.

For my entire trip to Norway was not a time of joy. This month, we commemorate and

remember the tenth anniversary of a tragedy that befell our country. This past July, Norway experienced a tragedy of her own.

July 22nd was one of those perfect days. The sun was shining and the occasional cloud drifted serenely overhead. It was a quiet Friday on campus. Classes were finished, the weekend was full of promise, and I was free to do as I wanted for the rest of the day. I was walking outside, enjoying the respite from the rain that week and feeling the breeze flow across the dormitory's courtyard. Although I was several miles from the city-center, I still heard the *clap* as I walked along the gravel path through campus. It was strange to me, this sound. Since there were no rainclouds, I ruled out thunder and decided it was a construction noise instead; one of the city's workers must have dropped something nearby.

I didn't hear the truth until later. The sound I had heard was not construction. Instead, a man had exploded a car bomb within the city and gunned down scores of innocent youths on a nearby island.

We sat around in shock the rest of the day. Rumors were flying about the school and people's nerves were, understandably, on edge. International media *shamelessly* speculated, and we all wondered at who would want to attack Norway, a state *known* internationally as a bastion of peace. That night, sitting in my dorm room, I waited for an answer to an age-old question. Why did it happen? And what can we do now? And though my tears fell, I don't have an answer; it is a question I have wrestled with for years. But, perhaps the Bible can provide insight where I fail.

There are many distinct differences between our September 11th and Norway's 22nd July. But in each case, sin caused the deaths of loved ones and the brokenness of our world was once more shown for all to see.

What can we do in these times? What *can* we do? At first, we *weep*. We let the hot tears of grief course down our cheeks, and we mourn for God's creation.

And then, we trust God.

As King David ran from his murderous enemies, he trusted God and raised his voice in the psalm:

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

O my God, in you I trust;

do not let me be put to shame;

do not let my enemies exult over me.

Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;

let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

God has the final victory over mourning and death. Even in the midst of suffering and loss, we can turn to Him. And yet, in the face of pain, such promises can seem empty or distant. How can God have the final victory when I grieve for a country I have come to love? How is our pain a victory? In fact, when these promises seem painfully empty, other parts of today's readings seem more appropriate.

The vindictive part of me listens to God's judgment in Ezekiel and finds solace in God's wrath:

4 Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: The one who sins is the one who will die.

My own sinful self rejoices in this. Isn't it wonderful to know that evil will be punished?

Isn't it pleasing to know that murderers will receive their due? That people who commit terrible acts, such as the ones on July 22nd, will be punished like they should be?

My pride, shown in these thoughts, is forcibly stopped moments later though, when God offers the mercy that we love Him for:

31 Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord GOD. Repent, then, and live.

God cannot place a hierarchy on sin. He is pure, Holy, and longs for all to live without offense. In His judgment, there is no difference between the murderer and me. Under God's command, we must remove all sin from our lives and repent of our shortcomings. When we long to respond to evil with evil, God reminds us that none of us are righteous, blameless... no not one.

In the days following the attack, our discussions on campus about the role of peace within the world took on new meaning. Elsewhere, it became evident that Norway would *not* respond to evil with evil. In light of the hate that was so wrongfully shown on July 22nd, the people of Norway responded not with malice, but with a re-commitment to openness and acceptance. In a world becoming more globalized and closer by the day, Norway refused to lash out against those who harbor such hate. I heard over and over from Norwegians, some of them influential politicians, how extremists should be taken in by the people and the system and shown *love* in order that they might change and offer love in return.

Isn't this exactly what Jesus came for?

In normal fashion, Jesus uses a story to depict an even more important point. A father asks his two sons to go work in the fields for him. The first says no; lazy or busy, we do not know, but he won't follow his father's commands. Next, the father asks the second son. He says yes. But he lies and refuses to work. In the meantime, the first son has a change of heart and goes to work in the fields. Jesus asks his followers which of the sons has done the father's command. The answer is easy: the one who actually went to work is the one who has done the Lord's will.

What we say is say is important, but what we actually *do* is paramount. When Jesus commands us to forgive those who do us wrong, He doesn't expect us to nod faithfully, say "yes," and carry loathing within our hearts. No, Christ calls us all to *do* what he asks.

One of the things I love about the Liberal Arts is the overlap between classes. In several of my courses this semester, we have talked about what justice is. What is this ideal? On the other hand, what is revenge? Do they exclude each other? In one class, a student mentioned that she couldn't agree with the Christian principle of forgive and forget. "It's dangerous," she said. "If we offer others second chances, they are just as likely to hurt us again." History has plenty of examples to back this student's opinion. Martin Luther King Jr. , Gandhi, Jesus: they all forgave and suffered as a result. After hearing her opinion, my professor nodded. "What you say is true," he responded. "But doing what's *right ...IS* often dangerous."

What we say is important, but it's what we *do* that counts. As the world mourns yet another horrible tragedy, how we respond is really what matters. Can we forgive a man who guns down children without a thought? Can we forgive a man who *hates* with a passion so rarely seen? Can others forgive us when we hurt them? In the end, we're no better than this murderer, so our answer is, *must* be yes.

Like his parable of the two sons, Jesus is watching what we do. Even though it hurts, even though we cannot fathom it, even if it's dangerous, we are called to forgive.

To close, a quote from Gandhi seems appropriate: "An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind."

Now, go out into the world, and when others sin against you, don't revenge; don't take their eye. Instead, like Norway, offer them new sight by gathering them in with love and forgiveness.

Amen.

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Bread for the Apple -Homecoming, SALT and campus ministry are joining forces in to serve the hungry of New York City—in memory of 9/11 and in honor of our homecoming theme.

Organizations are encouraged to host fund raising efforts to provide meals at the Soup Kitchen of Trinity Lutheran Church on the Lower Eastside of Manhattan. We'll see how many meals we can provide between now and homecoming! There will be a bake sale after chapel on Wednesday and Sundays.

Outreach teams host worship services and youth lock ins at churches across our region. Teams generally travel about once/month, are a great way to express and grow in your faith. Group meetings are also a great source of friendship, support and fun. All students are welcome to join. Check with Carol in the chapel office if you have questions about joining, or email Sydney Ipina saipinia09@ole.augie.edu or Anna Bahnson abbahanson10@ole.augie.edu

Pet Blessing - There will be a blessing of the animals on Mon., Oct. 3rd at 10 am. Feel free to bring any furred, feathered or finned friends (no snakes, please) and we will bless them. Treats for animals and humans will be provided!

CHAPEL SCHEDULE

- Mon. (26th) - Worship, 10 am - Janet Blank-Libra, Chair of Moral Values
- Wed. (28th) - Holy Communion, 10 am - Pr. Paul
- Fri. (30th) - Worship, 10 am - Becky Joerger, Sr. Spkr.
- Sun. (2nd) - Worship, 11 am - Pr. Paul
- Mon. (3rd) - Worship, 10 am - Pet Blessing - Sandra Looney