

Augustana College
Chapel of Reconciliation

Peace and New Beginnings

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16 April 2007

Psalm 118
Philippians 4; verses 4-9

Prayer: Heavenly father, we are grateful for all of the gifts which you so generously give. Thank you for the Augustana community and the opportunity we have to integrate faith and learning. Please bless this time together as we consider Peace and New Beginnings. Amen.

I was excited when I heard the news that our community would have an intentional focus on peace this spring. Thank you to the students who brought forth the idea and to all who have made it a reality and engaged in discussions of peace in our lives, our community, and our world.

As I begin, I would like to read you some definitions of Peace.

Peace is a state of harmony, the absence of hostility. *Peace* can also describe a relationship between any parties characterized by respect, justice, and goodwill.

Peace: Freedom from disquieting or oppressive thoughts or emotions

More generally, peace can pertain to an individual relative to her or his environment, as *peaceful* can describe calm, serenity, and silence. This latter understanding of peace can also pertain to an individual's sense of himself or herself, as to be "at peace" with one's self would indicate serenity, calm, and equilibrium within.

When Pastor Paul extended the invitation to speak, he asked if I would consider reflecting on "peace and new beginnings. Since I've been at Augustana for almost 17 years you may think it somewhat odd that I would be asked to speak on this topic. The suggestion came because Pastor Paul knows that in the admission office our focus is always on new beginnings, as we are engaged in communication with students and parents about a most important new beginning, college. It's also become widely known that we are a group that likes to celebrate, and nothing more so than a student's decision to join us at Augustana. So much so, that last year we instituted the ringing of the gong at the affirmation of each new beginning that will be at Augustana.

In reflecting on this topic, I found myself reconsidering what constitutes a new beginning. I thought about the myriad of new beginnings I've experienced during my years at Augustana. I was then quickly struck by the number I had experienced just in this academic year; a new President, new colleagues, and of course new students, signifying the beginning of new relationships. In October, my birthday arrived and I began not only a new year but a new decade. I won't say which one, but I'm told it is supposed to be fabulous.

It all sounds pretty great, so why the need to reflect on peace and new beginnings? It seems anyone would be in harmony with a visionary new leader, energetic new colleagues, and bright and talented new students. And, starting a new decade should certainly elicit peace, especially if one were to consider the alternative. I can honestly tell you that several months into all that is new, I am at peace but still in a bit of denial on the age thing.

For many, new beginnings bring anything but peace because they equal change and change can create a conflict within rather than harmony and calm emotions. I don't know about you, but there have certainly been times in my life when I have wanted to dig my heels in and prevent a new beginning or change from happening, because along with the unknown of each new beginning may come the ending of the known, the loved, and the celebrated. So having peace with a beginning can also require making peace with an ending, making it difficult to rejoice and be glad.

Over the years I've worked with hundreds of students as they consider their life beyond high school. Some can hardly wait to experience college; high school can't be over soon enough. And there are certainly those who seem to maintain some sort of perfect balance in celebrating the present and anticipating the future. Others can't imagine they will ever find friends as great as those they have now, or that they will find the same level of success or involvement in college. And they certainly can't imagine leaving their family.

Speaking of family, how about the parents? Some are so excited for their student that I think they would like to enroll at Augustana themselves, while others are crying in October at the thought of what is coming in September. Of course, there are brothers and sisters considering what this change means for them, as they vie for a new room or ponder how it will be to have more, or all, of mom and dad's attention focused on their behavior and activity. The latter often does not elicit peace.

Let's consider our new beginnings at Augustana. I've heard President Oliver say that we reinvent ourselves every year. One class graduates and a new one enrolls. Professors and staff retire or move on and new colleagues join us. Upperclassmen look forward to new experiences and new classes. Professors look forward to new students and new challenges. In the midst of all this change and all that is unknown, are we at peace?

Freshman, you moved into Bergsaker or Solberg Hall and experienced anything but a peaceful environment. I've never heard Tracy Riddle describe the first weeks in the freshman residence halls as calm, serene, or silent. But within those first weeks filled with excitement, energy, and anxiety, you found friends, you experienced professors who ignited in you a passion for questions and learning, you embraced a multitude of new experiences, and you became an Augiehollic. Were you at peace with this new beginning from the start or did it take some time?

For seniors, your time here as a student is coming to a close. You've spent four years preparing for the next, and all, new beginnings to come. Some of you already know what your immediate future holds and some of you are still overwhelmed with the possibilities. I've had conversations with many Augustana seniors over the years who are unabashed in saying they are not ready to leave. Is it because they feel they have more to accomplish, because they will miss roommates and seeing their friends every day, the challenge of papers and exams, and the anticipation of what will be served in the Commons? Or is it simply that it is sometimes hard to not be afraid; to truly trust that God will be with you in whatever lies ahead? Are there any correlations to what you felt as a freshman? How do you carry the peace you feel here into the future that is unknown and unlimited with possibility?

I asked earlier, what constitutes a new beginning? Is it only those significant events such as your freshman or senior year of college, graduate or professional school, your first job, a new year? Or should we consciously view each day, every hour, as a new beginning and a precious gift. Regardless of the simplicity or significance of each day, God is with us.

Have you ever missed the joy of a day or a new beginning, as in your anxiety or uncertainty you found yourself simply wishing the time or experience away? I wish it was next week and my chemistry test was over. I can't wait until June and I'm on summer break. I can't wait to have kids. I can't wait until the kids graduate. I can't wait until I retire and I have time for walks, vacations, and can actually read all of those books on my nightstand.

I commented recently that I've noticed I don't do this much anymore. Maybe it's facing this new decade and a strong desire to slow things down. Maybe it's that the days and weeks are disappearing so quickly that I don't have time to think about it. Maybe I'm allowing myself to spend a little less time worrying about the next new beginning and spending more time rejoicing in the gift of the present and the joy each day can bring.

I told Pastor Paul how grateful I was to be speaking after Easter. I love Easter, but I don't love Good Friday. Easter brings the most amazing new beginning, the celebration that Christ is Risen! I don't ever have a difficult time with the ending of the darkness and the joy of the light and the promise that is ours.

How appropriate that as we celebrate the resurrection, we are also blessed with the miracle of spring. This beginning of new life that we've waited for expectantly and yet somehow seems to catch us by surprise. Does it remind you of some of your new beginnings?

On Easter morning, I worshiped at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Watertown. Pastor Tom, of whom I'm a big fan, delivered the message. In his booming voice he looked out at the congregation and said, "I see God alive in you today!" Then he made us turn to two people, one of whom could not be a relative, and say the same thing. Now in a congregation of Lutherans, that's kind of a big request. He could hardly believe it when he saw two people stand up to get it done right. Those are powerful words. I see God alive in you today.

As I end this reflection, I want you to know that I see God alive in you. So much so, that it's hard for me to imagine that you experience anything but peace and harmony with who you are and what you can do. God is alive in you. Please consider those words at the beginning of each day and at the beginning of each milestone in your life. May you know peace at all times and in all places, in each simple day and each new beginning, for He is alive, his light shines within you, and the God of peace will always be with you.

Amen

PRAYER FOR PEACE - In honor of the recent four year anniversary of the Iraq War and in remembrance of those who have either been wounded or killed since hostilities began, the Augustana Coalition for Social Justice will be holding a "Die-in" on **Tuesday April 24th at 10:10**. They ask students to sacrifice 10 minutes of their morning to symbolically lie down on the patio of the Augustana Commons to represent and remember all those who have died or been wounded in Iraq. The Augustana Advocacy Team, in conjunction with the Augustana Coalition for Social Justice, will host a prayer service for peace that evening at 8:00.

SPRING CLEANUP DAY - This year Augustana will be hosting a baseball-themed Spring Cleanup Day on **Saturday, April 28 from 9:00-2:00**. We will work specifically with elderly community members, Lief Erikson, the Outdoor Campus, and the Zoo by helping with outdoor spring cleaning chores like raking, window washing, trash pickup, etc...This is an amazing event and I would encourage everyone to participate in serving our community. If you and/or others you know are interested in participating, please respond with the following information: Name, Box #, Phone #, Email, Red ID #, and if you have a Meal Plan (if you do not – one will be provided for you).

OFFERING OF LETTERS – BREAD FOR THE WORLD – FARM BILL - Each year, members of church congregations (including colleges) write letters to Congress in support of hunger-fighting legislation during their service and place them in the offering plate, dedicating the letters to God and saying special prayers for hungry and poor people. These letters are an opportunity to communicate with members of Congress to take steps toward ending hunger. Again and again, Offerings of Letters win significant victories.

This year, Bread for the World has chosen to advocate on behalf of the Farm Bill. For more information, see: <http://www.bread.org/take-action/letters-campaign/take-action.html>

Advocacy will provide information and encourage people to take action on this important initiative. **The kickoff will be Saturday, April 28 at Spring Cleanup Day** and will conclude with the Crop Walk (see below).

CROP WALK - Augustana students, faculty, staff, and administration are invited to participate in a CROP Hunger Walk on **Sunday, May 6th, 2007 at 1:00 pm**. CROP stands for "Communities Responding to Overcome Poverty." The walk will be ecumenical and multicultural with walkers from diverse backgrounds uniting around a common goal: relief for hungry people and for people who struggle to meet their most basic needs. Walkers are encouraged to take part in raising funds for the walk,

but all are welcome to participate. Of the funds raised, 25% will go to the South Dakota Food Bank; 70% will be sent to the international relief and development programs of the Church World Service; and 5% will be sent to Bread for the World.

For more information on the walk, see:

<http://www.churchworldservice.org/CROP/index.html>

Please contact Colleen McIntosh (cmmcintosh@ole.augie.edu) for more information on being a part of the Augustana team!

SEMESTER OF PEACE TIP FOR THE WEEK -Keep Fraud from Phoning - Senior are a frequent target of telemarketing harassment and scams. Register a senior for the National Do Not Call registry; visit www.donotcall.gov or call 888-0382-1222.

CHAPEL CALENDAR

Tues. (17 th)	Advocacy, 10 am - offering of letters
Wed. (18 th)	Holy Communion, 10 am - Dr. Monica Coleman, LSTC; Horn Quartet; Senior Academy
Fri. (20 th)	Worship, 10 am - Kelli Johnson, Sr. Spkr.
Sun. (22 nd)	Worship, 11 am - Prism Outreach Team
Mon. (23 rd)	Worship, 10 am - Patrick Hicks, Engl./Journ.