

Augustana College
Chapel of Reconciliation

Hearing our Callings: Beginning

Mark 8: 22-26

Pastor Paul Rohde

February 6, 2006

I want to both begin and end this sermon with a promise: “Your life matters to others.” The Bible teaches that love of God is like love of neighbor. Jesus frees us and calls us to offer our lives to others. It seems to me the question we’re wrestling is “How?” How do we see? How do we hear? How do we know or at least trust where God is calling?

A couple of brief stories:

Dr. Fred Niedner, professor at Valparaiso University, recently published the beginning of his vocation as a teacher.

My career as a teacher derives in part from a moment of youthful carelessness. Early in the year that I learned biblical Hebrew, I amused a friend as we walked to class by offering an unflattering imitation of my teacher. As we reached the classroom building, I became aware of someone walking close behind us to whom I’d paid no attention. Yes, it was the teacher. His face declared plainly that my caricature had not amused him.

When class began, he called on me first to recite the conjugations assigned for that day. The same thing happened the next day, and the next, and for some days thereafter. This ritual resulted in my studying Hebrew like I had never studied anything previously. The learning that ensued eventually came more from love than from fear, and it ultimately led to graduate studies and a life in academe. To this day, I tell students I’m working to pay for my sins. I mean it as a joke, of course, but not completely.

I can tell a similar story about my calling as a husband. In the summer of 1979, I was the program director of Luther Crest Bible Camp. The day camp director was a delightful young woman whose name I had difficulty remembering. I’d see her coming across camp and torment myself with the question, “Is it Sue or is it Deb?” I guessed DEB [WRONGLY] every time. The only thing more surprising than if someone had told me that three years later I would marry her, is if someone had told her that three years later she would marry me!

I start with these stories because they help me say that like our Gospel, our callings begin with our not seeing [even the names, much less the needs of our neighbors]. The beginning of the Gospel is blindness. It isn't merely that Dr. Niedner didn't see his Hebrew teacher behind him. He hadn't yet seen the power of language or a text or even his own gifts until he was punished into focus.

The Gospel begins with what we cannot see. This baffling little miracle in Mark 8 makes clear that even following Jesus, we do not see it all at once. The blind man says, "I see people, but they look like trees walking." That is not the most impressive miracle! Maybe Mark wants to give us the faithful persistence of Jesus more than impressive outcomes. The Gospel begins with what we cannot see and then it gives us Jesus persistence to help us trust when seeing and hearing seem not to come.

This winter I read a fascinating and fun essay entitled, "A Field Guide to Getting Lost" by cultural historian Rebecca Solnit. Solnit observes that the 19th century explorers didn't get lost because they didn't expect to know where they were. Daniel Boone said he was never lost, though he was confused for three weeks once. Daniel Boone and his cronies started not knowing where they were—and they learned to read signals, to hunt and fish and learn from natives. They learned to take it a step at a time.

Maybe the difficulty in "getting started" is not so much that we cannot see but that we expect to see. And maybe the danger in expecting to see is that we make discernment more about telling Jesus what he needs to show us, instead of listening to what he's telling us and looking even when the signals remain confusing.

The goal of Mark's text is not that we will see the future. Nor is it that we see or know what others need. It is that we see the one who will show us—if we will be patient when people still look like trees and persistent when hope still looks like shadows. We're going to linger in this chapter of Mark. Today we begin by not seeing. We begin with Mark giving us Jesus' faithful persistence when the blind man doesn't see. Two weeks from now we'll continue with "Hearing our Callings: clarity". We'll hear Jesus' persistence again when Peter has a moment of clarity and more than a few moments of surprise.

We began with this promise: you matter. You are called to make a difference. The Gospel gives us this truthfulness: you won't see it all. You won't see your teacher behind you or belovedness in front of you. You won't see the future. I hope Mark helps you see Jesus, who touches the blind and the broken and persists with the forgetful. And I pray that Jesus' persistence empowers you to move toward uncertainty. Hearing your calling has more to do with moving toward uncertainty than knowing for sure.

For that we need a second promise. Dr. Niedner concluded his article, "Even mistakes hold promise of blessing." So start there: You'll make some mistakes. Let the light of Jesus free you to know, "You'll make some mistakes." Even mistakes hold the promise of blessing. Let the persistence of Jesus give you freedom to try. You'll stumble and stall. You'll lose your way—even if you don't call it lost, you'll be confused sometimes.

You'll see miracles and be disappointed. You'll be disappointed and discover miracles. Sometimes people will look like trees and sometimes the darn trees will look like people.

Start, believing you matter. Start, knowing you won't see it all at once. Start with the promise of the Light of the world, showing light enough for a step and persistence enough for eternity.

Niedner puts it this way:

My students wrestle with vocational choices and seek direction for their lives. They ask if there's some plan they must discern. Maybe, I answer. But you won't see the pattern until you look back from some perch in time many years hence. Hopefully, from that vantage point you'll see guidance and even some grace along the way.

If I could go back to the year I learned Hebrew, hopefully I'd not again behave so rudely. Still, I can't imagine trading the life I have for whatever might have stemmed from a more virtuous conversation that day. Even mistakes can hold promise of blessing.

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

SPRING BREAK SERVICE LEARNING SIGN-UP HAS BEGUN! Spring break trips are offered to Ocean Springs, MS [hurricane Katrina relief], Pine Ridge, SD, and New York City. Each group is limited to 12 participants; sign up on a first come basis:

Ocean Springs, Mar 24-Apr. 1, cost \$600

New York City, Mar 24-30, cost \$600

Pine Ridge, Mar 24-27, cost \$100

Sign up and bring a \$100 deposit to the chapel office SOON!

ARE YOU PASSIONATE ABOUT MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD? Campus Ministry is building a Lutheran student advocacy team! The team would attend the Ecumenical Advocacy Days in Washington, D.C. in March for training. Then, in collaboration with the ELCA's Washington office, the team will advocate with representatives on the state and federal levels of the government about issues relating to hunger, world poverty, AIDS, and many other domestic and international social justice issues. This team will also seek to raise awareness about these issues and what we as students can do to impact them. **If you're interested in being a part of this advocacy team, please contact Kari Lenander or Ellie Kunkel.**

FAITH FEST VOLUNTEERS WANTED - Faith Fest is a high school gathering, held on campus **Sat., Feb. 11 - Sun., Feb. 12**, sponsored by the Outreach Ministries of Augustana College which brings youth together to learn and experience growing in Christ through various speakers, musicians, and activities. Augustana students can sign up to be group leaders for the weekend or other positions which include: set-up and take-down crews, registration, Elmen helpers, and coffeehouse performers. If you are interested in helping with this event, please sign up in the Narthex of the Chapel or contact Kim Davison or Kari Lenander for more information

CAMP FAIR - On Monday, February 13th, representatives from area camps will be available for conversation and questions, on the Student Street of the Mortenson Center, from 10:30 - 4:00 pm. If you are considering an exciting and rewarding summer job, please stop by and visit with the reps. The chapel speaker that day is Julie Smith from Camp Onomia, in Minnesota. NOTE: Augustana grants a scholarship to all students who work at a church camp!!!

SEMINARY REPRESENTATIVES will be on campus on Tuesday, Feb. 14. They will be at the Koinonia meeting in the chapel and all are welcome to come and listen and ask questions about church vocations and the candidacy process. Appointments with the individual reps. Are available through the chapel office. Just call 5403 or email the chapel office.

CHAPEL CALENDAR

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| Tuesday (7) | Roman Catholic Mass, 10 am - Fr. Justin Wachs |
| Wednesday (8) | Holy Communion, 10 am - Sarah Sumner-
Eisenbraun, Ministry Intern |
| Friday (10) | Worship, 10 am - Carl Rasmussen, Sr. Speaker |
| Sunday (12) | Faith Fest worship, 11 am - Pr. Paul |
| Monday (13) | Camp Worship, 10 am - Julie Smith, Camp Onomia |
| Tuesday (14) | Koinonia, 10 am - Seminary Reps. (Available by
appointment through the chapel office) |
| Wednesday (15) | Holy Communion, 10 am - Justin Mootz, '01;
Chamber Choir; Senior Academy |