

Augustana College  
Chapel of Reconciliation

## **Hearing our Calling: Clarity**

Mark 8: 27-36

Pastor Paul Rohde

February 20, 2006

I am grateful that the Gospel is more story than answer. There are, of course, answers. In v. 29, Peter responds to the question, “Who do you say that I am?” with the words, “You are the Christ.” It appears he got the answer “right!” This is clarity and it’s good.

But in vv. 31-33, Peter gets the answer wrong. Jesus is telling them plainly he must suffer and die. Peter says, “No!” and Jesus says, “Get behind me Satan. You are setting your mind on human things, not divine.” Wrong answer. I guess this is clarity, too.

Even if you work the averages, 1 right, 1 wrong is 50%, usually an F. Peter is in trouble at Augustana!

But the Gospel and I are going to say, our vocational discernment and our lives are more story than answer. We’ve been listening in to Mark 8. Two weeks ago we read the mysterious story of a man who sort of saw. By not seeing all at once, he learned some things about how beginning to know who we are and what we’re called to do is about moving toward uncertainty.

Today that miracle is followed by a disciple who has a moment of clarity and then an even bigger moment of surprise about what the clarity meant. Though we’re calling it clarity and though we’re always looking for clarity about what we’re called to do and be, we’re still moving toward uncertainty.

When we explore the question, “What are we called to do?” we are yearning for a voice in the night that says, “Samuel, Samuel” or a voice that says “Go to Egypt and free the slaves!” or “Put your nets on the other side of the boat.” If we think of clarity like an answer, we make it one decision. Nurse. Teach. Fish. Or ski. Maybe one of the biggest misconceptions about vocational clarity [and life itself] is that it’s only one decision. It is in fact, many, many decisions. You take a class, and then another. Eventually you declare a major. Even after you get general direction, there are lots of options. So you’re going to teach—inner city or small town? Secondary or elementary? Forever or for now?

When I say the Gospel is more story than answer, I mean that unlike answers, story holds good and bad, right and wrong together. What’s more it has the capacity for irony, nuance, and complexity.

The Gospel has much good news here. First it makes clear that in the story of our lives, RIGHT answers in the first paragraph don't have the power to stop WRONG answers in the next paragraph. This keeps life exciting. The Gospel includes better news: in the story of God in our lives, wrong answers do not stop the story. Because the Gospel is about a living God calling *real* humans into a very real and surprising world, we have the hope of the story continuing.

There are in our lives, like this text, moments of insight. Peter may be having one of these when he says, "You are the Christ." There are also moments of courage. Perhaps Peter isn't sure, but he needs to say something and college taught him to fill in the bubbles on the answer sheet so he goes for it and blurts something out, "I believe you're the Christ." And 2 millennia later people are still quoting him! There are moments of clarity. And there are lots and lots of moments we realize like Peter we don't have the foggiest idea what the clarity means. The Gospel promises this is God's story for us.

I had tremendous clarity on a date in 1981. I looked my beloved square in the eye and said, "I don't know what's going to happen and I don't know what you're thinking of for timing, but this much for sure. I am NOT going to graduate from seminary, get married, ordained and installed all in the same summer." Then came 1982. May 30, July 3, August 29 and September 5.

I remember vividly the day I learned I was called to be a father. The same beloved came home and said, "You're going to be a dad." And I can only acknowledge that I didn't have the foggiest idea what it meant. For the parents here, our slogan has become, "We raised several perfect children before we had our own."

Jobwise my own sense is that the uncertainties that have felt like callings tapped who I am, needed what I most enjoy, and needed just a little more. Each job change has looked like it could use all that I'd learned *and more*. The Gospel story continues and even promises growth.

Sometimes new callings ask for a lot more. Like Jesus of Peter in today's Gospel. Jesus says, "It is necessary to suffer and die. . ." This may not immediately be good news, but it's important to talk about. When something starts to hurt, we can assume we're doing something wrong. Jesus insists the Gospel story includes these frightful, painful chapters. Whether you're going to teach piano or sell insurance or be a rocket scientist, you will be called to bear a piece of the world's hurt, and serve up a piece of God's healing and forgiving renewal.

The good news is the promise that Jesus goes before you and with you. The rest of the good news is that you matter and the privilege of helping may override even the pain. As a preacher the Bible is now populated with the names of the folks who've asked me to bring a word to them. The passage we have in front of us this morning is no exception. In 1992, Peg asked me to preach her funeral and I used this text. I remember it because it was the first time I preached a funeral for someone my own age. I chose Mark 8 because it seemed like our whole community had been screaming, "No!" A brain tumor.

Malignant. Terminal. No. No. No. When our “no’s” didn’t stop the cancer, we turned to Peter who validated our response and who helps us know that our refusals don’t stop Jesus promise to walk with us. Nor do they stop the Gospel story that keeps calling us to new life.

On one level, this story is an example of times the callings are impossibly painful. On another it describes how privilege and growth include even the pain we want to refuse. The story and the text help us know that making peace with mortality is not something pastors do, it’s something mortals do. Our refusals do not end the story. . . or the promise that Jesus goes with us.

I wish I could say I’d learned. That when my life seems to be Jesus saying, “OK, Paul, there’s some hard stuff to learn, better let me go first,” I say, “Of course, Jesus.” The gift of the gospel is that even when I say, “Absolutely not!” it doesn’t end the story. The same promise that says Jesus must suffer and die, promises that He sees us through to resurrection, learning, and new clarity about our vocations.

Some of the best advice I ever got was from a spiritual director when I was struggling with a decision about a job change. She said, “Paul, you keep looking for the perfect step. You don’t need the perfect step, you just need the next step.” It isn’t really an answer. The “next step” honors that clarity and calling, our lives and the very Gospel are more of a story. God goes with us and promises that redemption is a story we will not stop! Amen.



## CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

**CHAPEL STAFF - Applications are open for campus ministry staff, 06-07.** Leaders are sought for worship, involvement, outreach, service, webpage and ecumenical endeavors of campus ministry. Commitment is 4-5 hours/week. Forms are available in the office and need to be returned by Feb. 28.

**BUSY PERSON'S RETREAT - Everyone is invited** to be a part of the 3rd annual Busy Person's Retreat! The Retreat on campus this year will be **Sunday, Feb. 26 through Thursday, Mar. 3.** We will have three religious sisters on campus to provide spiritual direction at times you pick that fit into your schedule. This is an ecumenical opportunity and participation covers a broad spectrum of faiths. We had 22 participants last year and all of them spoke very highly of their experience with the sisters. This is a wonderful opportunity to take a break during your busy days and prepare for the Lenten season that arrives March 1st! If you would like to sign up or have any questions, please email Eric Pederson [eric\\_pederson@augie.edu](mailto:eric_pederson@augie.edu) Or sign up on the Narthex table sheet. All are welcome to participate!!!

### ORGAN RECITALS:

**Saturday, February 25 at 6:00 PM--former Augustana music major, Lars Gjerde** of Norway will present an organ recital at the Augustana Chapel of Reconciliation. After two years at the Grieg Conservatory in Bergen, Norway, Lars currently is studying organ with Professor David Higgs at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY. Lars will present a varied program of works by Bach, Liszt, Alain, Vierne and a new work written especially for him by Scott Perkins, also a student at Eastman. Lars' recital is free and open to the public.

### CHAPEL CALENDAR

Tuesday (21)	Youth Mentors, 10 am - Bible Study with Pr. Sarah - Sol.lobby - 8 pm
Wednesday (22)	Holy Communion - Pr. Ed Goode, 1 <sup>st</sup> Pres.
Friday (24)	Worship, 10 am - Emily Vadner, Sr. Speaker
Sunday (26)	Distinguished Scholar Worship - 9 am - Chris Croghan Sunday Worship - 11 am - Born Anew Outreach Team
Monday (27)	Worship, 10 am - Billie Streufert, Hall Director