Augustana College
Chapel of Reconciliation

Pr. Paul Rohde

The Word of God endures forever.

Opening meeting
2 Sept 2010.

You’ll know I’ve been on sabbatical when I say I like that part of the text where it says the sower sleeps. A good night’s sleep is not only healthy and wise, it is holy and blessed. We won’t be more than a few weeks into the semester and we’ll know this blessedness—or the need for it—even more intensely. I know I’m not the only one in this room kept awake at night with questions: what more could do? How better could we say it? How can I help them hear the implications in the questions?

Every once in awhile, I hear that sermons also contribute well to the blessed gift of sleep. If you’re feeling the need for a nap already, you’re in the text. Sweet dreams. Rest in peace. The organ will wake you in about 8 or 9 minutes. . .sleeping and rising is good practice in the letting go which is trusting that God is at work.

The word is sown like seed. The reign of God is like one scattering seed and then sleeping. One of the first gifts of our motto is the way it takes us out of the subject of the sentence. God’s word endures forever. God endures forever. . .we and our work, of course, do not. Paul put it to the Corinthians, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.” We have our roles—to cast seed, to tend growth, to water and weed, but God is the subject. And the enduring purposes of God—to call us to life and service and joy undergird our freedom. And that includes our freedom to rest. It also includes delight and gratitude and hope in the growth and fruit that comes. Mark says this is the very power of God.

My conversations with Janet this summer have stirred the question, “Where on campus to we see this enduring, freeing, lifegiving word? There are so many particular metaphors for who God is and how God is at work within the Word of God. The word and its symbols are all around. It’s important for us to know them. The prophets say God is a potter. The potters’ wheels—and maybe the kilns-- in the ceramics studio are symbols of this creative endurance. The Word says, “remember” and you know the word of God is history. Another echoes “heart and soul and mind” and the psychologist perk up. Neighbor makes it sociology. I’m curious if the economists or business folks have a symbol for love of money? The Psalms command us to SING and to play the trumpet and lyre. Mike Wanous, stood in this chapel a few years ago to say that God’s word calls us photons and sodium chloride. Hurt and healing call for nursing. All this talk about
Word makes it obvious, God must have majored in English! Rocky would remind us that these words originally were Hebrew, or Aramaic or Greek, so God majored in classics. . . OR Modern Foreign Languages may assert God majored in translation. There are so many good symbols for our work in the word and the word at work among us, enduring in giving and blessing life and community.

The support staff has no doubt noticed that quiet, humble service gets high praise for the way the Word of God endures. My favorite caricature of Augustana was Nancy Wright’s description of us as a dysfunctional family. The drama comes from a combination of very precocious children [the students, of course] and the eccentric parents, the faculty. And sanity comes from the butlers and maids, the nannies and gardeners. In the word of God, quiet service--baking bread, washing feet and floors, caring for children get high praise. No life or faith would endure without it.

The word of God endures forever.

It may be that the most important thing about the Bible is to notice that it includes 66 books. It is not a book, it is a library. When it comes to the mystery of God, no one voice gets it all. Lutherans would say the most important thing about the Word of God is its becoming human—first in Christ, the Word made flesh, and then through Christ in us, becoming human and called to serve the enduring word to forgive and free, bring life and hope, justice and peace.

If we’re going to take a walk across campus, and Janet and I hope we are, where will we point for a symbol to capture this living, active word undergirding and empowering life and learning? I’ll play with three options.

We could point to Moses hanging over there on the library. It is a potent reminder that some, some few words are important enough, true enough, helpful enough to be carved in stone. This is a picture of endurance, to be sure. . .it’s not fazed by winter, it doesn’t fade in the sun, it doesn’t move in the wind. Since 1955 ten Roman numerals carved in limestone picture the endurance of the Word of God.

The Gospel we just heard turns our eyes more to the campus green. The sower sows the word like seed. And it sprouts and grows—in all kinds of soil, night and day, from the tiniest mustard seed to the greatest tree. And the sower gets good rest while it grows. Endurance in this picture is not so much hard and fast it is reliable and rhythmic. God’s word, like Christ himself, falling into the ground and dying that it may raise again. Luther once said, the resurrection is proclaimed in every leaf of springtime. God’s word enduring—exposed to the wind, suffering the harsh winter, and then alive again to remind us that God endures, brings life from death, and beauty so bountiful we can scarcely take it in.

With the Moses statue, the word of God is hard and fast and never changing. With seed and seasons, it is dynamic and alive and ever changing. Both of these symbols can say Jesus Christ
is the same yesterday and today and forever, but they say it VERY differently. And I’m sure you’ve noticed that this difference is stirring a good bit of strife in many denominations including our own.

In a polarized moment in history, I’ve been pressing the text and my own imagination for a more nuanced and complex metaphor. I’ll begin by asserting that a good night’s sleep is supported by a promise that life will rise in the morning AND by sturdy concrete footings beneath us. The same Bible that says cast your life like a seed says build your house on a rock, because the storms will come.

When Paul Rasmussen, ’03, preached his senior sermon, he offered the sidewalks as a picture of the power of God at Augustana. The sidewalks connect us, he said. In an academy that sorts our disciplines with the word “divisions,” it’s important to have a symbol of connection. The potters need what the physicists know about heat—how much for how long and to what effect before. The translators go often to the librarians. . . . and the librarians go everywhere to hear what needs to be read. Nurses know that poetry serves healing, and poets and actors and actresses know that their words are not ends in themselves. The sidewalks are a symbol of word of God enduring in connections of heart, soul, mind, and strength, self and neighbor, belief and action, memory and hope.

The sidewalks are made of concrete, but they make no claims of being unchanging. Elmer Smolnisky, an emeritus from facilities, used to say there are two kinds of concrete, new and cracked. The story of Moses tells us the tablets of stone were no sooner carved and they were smashed. Maybe even potholes offer the possibility that creativity is more powerful than certainty, the life giving promise of God more enduring than the law.

One of the things that commits me to church and worship is that it is the only place I know where folks from every walk of life gather regularly around ancient texts. Which is to say, we pay attention together to the paths of people across the ages. We learn sturdiness in the face of life and death, courage in forging new paths of peace and justice, and to learn companionship every step of the way—even and especially the companionship of God who became human in Jesus.

I am drawn to sidewalks as symbol because they both get us close to new life and keep us from stomping on it. New life and growth is always fragile and lord knows, stomping on it is a problem—and not just in our yards. When the sustainability of creation is at stake, we need to be as clear about sturdy boundaries as are about freedom and abundance. When knowledge or faith gets too hard and fast, the symbols we’re using really matter. When a student reflects some sturdiness like, “I know what I know and you aren’t going to change it.” Maybe it’s helpful to be able to say, or “it may feel like stone, but really it’s a kernel and it won’t grow until it’s cracked open.”

The most radical statement of God’s power in this parable is that it is alive, enduring, growing even when you’re asleep. 150 years later, may it give us gratitude for all who persevered in this
promise, and courage to cast all we know and are into the prairie wind and imagination, joy, and rest in God who will bring the growth. Amen.
**Prelude**

“Praeludium in E Major” by Vincent Lubeck

Marilyn Schempp, organ

**Invocation**

L: O God, open our lips,  
C: And our mouths shall declare your praise.

L: O God, open our eyes,  
C: That we may behold your presence.

L: O God, open our ears,  
C: That we may hear your call.

L: O God, open our hearts,  
C: That we may respond to your love.

L: O God, open our lives,  
C: That we may rejoice in You, serve our neighbors and live your promises together with all creation.

**Prayer**

Hymn  
“Word of God, Come Down on Earth”

ELW #510

Scripture  
“Living Word”  
Mark 4: 14, 26-29.

Sermon  
“On What Has Now Been Sown”  
Pastor Paul

Hymn  
“On What Has Now Been Sown”  
ELW #550

**Lord’s Prayer**

**Benediction**

In keeping with the sesquicentennial, Janet Blank-Libra, chair for moral values, and I will invite the community to imaginative engagement with the symbols and stories that reveal the inner world of Augustana and the deepest parts of ourselves. We begin today with the Augustana seal. The seal was designed in the 1940s by Ogden Dalrymple. The maple carving which hangs in the Siverson Lounge was created by Amo Hovland, a 1950 graduate. The four letters on the open Bible at the center of the seal stand for the Latin phrase, *Verbum Dei Manet in Aeternum*, meaning the “Word of God endures forever.” This is the focus of our worship this afternoon.

**Chapel Worship is at 10 AM weekdays. Everyone is welcome!**

Monday - Service of the Word and Prayer

Tuesday - Roman Catholic mass, September 14 and first Tuesday/month thereafter

Wednesday - Holy Communion

Thursday - Retreat in Daily Life*

Friday - Senior Speakers

Sunday - Eucharist, 11 AM

**Retreat in Daily Life:** Faculty, staff and students are invited to a weekly prayer “retreat.” The guide is a book created at Creighton University to adapt the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* for daily prayer. We meet each Thursday at 10 AM beginning September 16 for prayer, discussion, discovery and support.
OPENING MEETING OF THE AUGUSTANA COMMUNITY

Thursday, September 2, 2010
1:30 pm
Chapel of Reconciliation

V D M A
Verbum Dei Manet in Aeternum
The Word of God Endures Forever

Prelude
“Praeludium in E Major” by Vincent Lubeck Marilyn Schempp, organ

Invocation
L: O God, open our lips,
C: And our mouths shall declare your praise.
L: O God, open our eyes,
C: That we may behold your presence.
L: O God, open our ears,
C: That we may hear your call.
L: O God, open our hearts,
C: That we may respond to your love.
L: O God, open our lives,
C: That we may rejoice in You, serve our neighbors and live your promises together with all creation.

Prayer
Hymn
“Word of God, Come Down on Earth” ELW #510
Scripture
“Living Word” Mark 4: 14, 26-29.
Sermon
“On What Has Now Been Sown” Pastor Paul
Hymn
“On What Has Now Been Sown” ELW #550

Lord’s Prayer
Benediction

In keeping with the sesquicentennial, Janet Blank-Libra, chair for moral values, and I will invite the community to imaginative engagement with the symbols and stories that reveal the inner world of Augustana and the deepest parts of ourselves. We begin today with the Augustana seal. The seal was designed in the 1940s by Ogden Dalrymple. The maple carving which hangs in the Siverson Lounge was created by Amo Hovland, a 1950 graduate. The four letters on the open Bible at the center of the seal stand for the Latin phrase, Verbum Dei Manet in Aeternum, meaning the “Word of God endures forever.” This is the focus of our worship this afternoon.

Chapel Worship is at 10 AM weekdays. Everyone is welcome!

Monday - Service of the Word and Prayer
Tuesday - Roman Catholic mass, September 14 and first Tuesday/month thereafter
Wednesday - Holy Communion
Thursday - Retreat in Daily Life*
Friday - Senior Speakers
Sunday - Eucharist, 11 AM

Retreat in Daily Life: Faculty, staff and students are invited to a weekly prayer “retreat.” The guide is a book created at Creighton University to adapt the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius for daily prayer. We meet each Thursday at 10 AM beginning September 16 for prayer, discussion, discovery and support.