

Augustana College  
Chapel of Reconciliation

Pr. Paul Rohde

**Bergsaker: Symbol of Beginnings**

4 Oct 2010

I like to say that liturgy is practice in what we believe is true all the time. God is present all the time. In liturgy we practice consciousness of this presence. We are called to turn from sin, live in forgiveness, listen to God, offer our gifts and share peace all the time. . .and, of course, each of these takes a great deal of practice. Ritual offers that practice. Worship unites what we do and what we say to practice the gifts of God in our lives all the time.

Today our worship is a walk. . . to Bergsaker Hall to reflect on new beginnings. We'll practice paying attention, remembering and garnering courage for beginnings we make ourselves and connecting our prayers and songs with God's call to Augustana now for 150 years. We'll practice putting one foot in front of another. If it doesn't go very well, we're practicing that bumps and disruptions and unexpected disappointments are part of new beginnings, too. We hope we'll all learn things about walking together as Augustana toward God's new creation.

The island of Iona is a very significant Celtic pilgrimage site in Scotland. Every Tuesday the island pilgrimage takes pilgrims to several places of historic, faithful, or personal significance. At each stop folks listen to Scripture or poetry, reflect on a question or gift or challenge, and pray together. We're hoping to develop such a pilgrimage for our sesquicentennial celebration in April. These 3 Mondays in October are practices toward that end. . . As we do this, we'd like your suggestions of subsequent places an Augustana pilgrimage should go. Where would we stop? The kilns in the art studio? The huddle? What used to be the Jabberwocky???? And what would we say there? to help us remember and evoke and connect our lives to insights about heritage and hope, to significant gifts from God, to the ministry God both calls and gives in this place.

We gather today in the name of God, whom the book of Revelation calls both Alpha and Omega, beginning and end.

Let us pray.

God you are our endings and our beginnings. Open our eyes and ears and hearts and minds to your presence and promise, to those who have walked before us, and to those who walk with us now and to all who will follow. Open our eyes and ears and hearts and minds to your

promises—to walk with us, to bring us to new life, to knit us in love. Help us practice—listening to you, receiving your good gifts and living your legacy of redeeming and hopeful beginnings. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Chaim Potok began his book, In the Beginning, with the simple sentence. “Beginnings are hard.”

TS Eliot ends his “Little Giddings”

We shall not cease for exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And Know the place for the first time.

In 1860, Augustana began. This year we're celebrating 150 new beginnings for this school, community, work. And that's only the beginnings of academic calendars. I wonder how many new approaches, challenges, questions; paradigm shifts have begun in this period of time. To know where the college is to go, we need to know where it's been. . .that is emphatically both facts and interpretation.

I wonder how many new beginnings for people happen here. I would argue that one of the most important parts of our mission is to receive the gifted, if fragile, first steps of young adults who arrive here and at Solberg. At least as important is preparing you for the next great leap four years later. . . That ending we insist is a beginning so we call it commencement .

What's happening in beginnings? What do you see? Believe? Hope for? Memories and symbols, stories and interpretations all help us know what beginning is. . . . and are crucial learning for times we will begin again. So we return to where we began, perhaps to know the place for the first time. And we garner symbols of promise to carry with us.

How about the curb? It could be a symbol for stumbling—that happens easily with steps in new beginnings. On the other hand, it could speak of being lifted—it is a “step up” after all. It's also a symbol of excitement or fear or both and maybe moreso if you're on a skateboard. The quiet little curb down there can help us know that new beginnings are leaps. And that's as true for a college as it is a freshman!

The road screams movement, turns, and narrow ways. It's a one way. . . there's no going back to where you started. You come out again, but in a different place. That's been true for Augustana's story. . . . and it's true of ours, too.

The driveway is a drop off point, a place of leave taking. It could symbolize so much of what we feel in new beginnings? Have I been dropped? Left?

In my mind's eye, the symbols I see most often are the contraptions people bring to loft their beds. On move in day it always feels like 110 degrees back there in the stairwell. I am in awe of the hefty, sturdy, not to mention imaginative construction behind bunk beds. You meet someone on the stairs with a 2 X 12, hammer, saw, bolts and a drill. Construction. That's a symbol for new beginnings.

I'm of course trying to evoke metaphors. No parent comes here with their 18 year old without hoping against hope they have given sturdy preparation, sturdy promises, hefty gifts of love and affirmation. Maybe constructing those lofts symbolizes our hope that we'll rest in all the sturdiness behind us.

Then again, there are the religious things I hear dad's mutter when the bleep, bleep boards don't fit. It isn't only the weather that's 110 degrees that day. What starts as a symbol for sturdiness shifts to a sign of adaptation, adjustment, measuring again.

We'd love to simply decide, beginnings are construction. But the bunks are no sooner constructed, the carpets laid, the computers booted--and we watch families pull apart before our very eyes. They stand here and hug as close and as long as they can and then they must go. Everyone is making a new beginning. Beginnings are not merely building, they are letting go of what was.

Those of us who prepare you for commencement, the next huge, fragile beginning also hope we send you with sturdy vision and skill for constructing, practice at adjusting and adapting, and faith to connect endings and beginnings.

Isaiah and Revelation promise that God is in these beginnings. Isaiah says, "Remember—it's always been like this. I am God, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done. I will accomplish all I purpose." Revelation declares God will be with us. . . and dry every tear! These are sturdy promise to sustain us in new beginnings.

If this were only a walk, we'd think we knew what was going on. We call it a pilgrimage to acknowledge that there is always much more going on than we realize.

It is the height of understatement to say that I do not claim to know all that goes on in this dorm. It is both threat and promise to assure you that God does! Like every other symbol, the dorm itself is both gift and challenge.

I think the thing I'm most hoping will happen on these walks is that insight will help us connect promise to the ambiguous and ambivalent. We pause here to reflect. . .to look and listen and think and feel, to remember and hope. We've come because we don't automatically see promise here—or in any beginning. We return together to hear and believe and trust that God is here, seeing it all, and moving us toward God's purposes. And if we connect it here, I pray we'll connect it everywhere.

Let us pray:

God, go before us to guide us, above us to watch over us, behind us to encourage us, within us to give us peace. . .between us that we live your love, In Jesus name. Amen.

***“Go My Children With My Blessing”***

Jaroslav J. Vjada © 1983 Concordia Publishing House - Used by permission

Pr. Paul Rohde - Meditation

Mark Braun - Guitar

Sarah Peasely - Flute

## CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

**SERVICE TRIP (Fall Break)** - Campus ministry is offering a service learning trip to Pine Ridge over Fall Break, Oct. 22-25. Cost is approximately \$100; registration with \$50 deposit is due in the chapel office is due by October 8. There is also a survey of j-term and spring break possibilities in the narthex. . .let us know your preferences.

**PET BLESSING** - In celebration of the feast of St. Francis, we invite you to “paws” for a pet blessing at 10 am, Oct. 8<sup>th</sup>. Bring your pet or a picture of your pet and celebrate all of God’s creatures! Treats for two and four legged creatures following worship! There will be a collection of pet food for Second Chance Rescue center in the Commons and in the Chapel.

**BANQUET** – Campus Ministry is serving the Banquet, the local downtown soup kitchen, on **Fri., Oct. 15<sup>th</sup>**. There is a sign-up sheet on the Narthex table. The food prep shift is from 2-4 pm, and the serving shift starts at 5:15 pm. We will be doing some car pooling if you need a ride to the Banquet, which is on 8<sup>th</sup> St. and Weber Ave.

**OUTREACH** – Groups of students lead worship and youth retreats across the region. A great way to get acquainted with a smaller group of students of all ages with a modest time commitment. Applications on the table in the chapel Narthex. Sign up soon!!!

### CHAPEL SCHEDULE

Tuesday (5 <sup>th</sup> )	Catholic Mass, 10 am - Fr. Jim Breem
Wednesday (6 <sup>th</sup> )	Holy Communion, 10 am - Jim Bies; ASA Inaug.
Friday (8 <sup>th</sup> )	Pet Blessing, 10 am
Sunday (10 <sup>th</sup> )	Homecoming Worship, 10:30 - Elmen Center
Monday (11 <sup>th</sup> )	Walking Worship, 10 am - Janet Blank-Libra
Tuesday (12 <sup>th</sup> )	Koinonia, 10 am