

Augustana Baccalaureate  
May 21, 2011  
John 14: 1-7  
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When you hear this description of God's house—many rooms, a space prepared for everyone—don't you think of Solberg and Bergsaker immediately? Spacious? Gracious? Prepared for you? It seems like about 20 minutes ago, we put on our favorite blue and yellow clothes and our biggest smiles to welcome you to campus. If we greeted you with "Welcome home!" I have a hunch you didn't believe us. When a frosh is honest enough to admit it feels like it'll never be home, I use another language, "There will be a way," I promise. There will be a way.

It's almost as if the Gospel holds a big smiling sign of the world—the real world, this time, whatever that means—and says, "Class of 2011: welcome home! There will be a place for you. Life is full of grace and freedom. The world is loved by God. Welcome home!" If you have trouble believing that, if it feels like it'll never be true, the text has another message, "There will be a way!" God in Christ Jesus is making a way.

There you have it. In the space of these seven short verses, the Gospel of John gives us two of the most important metaphors in all of faith, maybe in all of language. One is *home*. The other is a *way*. There is a good bit of tension between them. Home says belonging, safety, intimacy and warmth. The way says seeking, yearning. It says risk and incomplete and new. Both of these are vital to faith and life: you belong, there is a place for you. That is promise and the promise of God. And the way is bumpy and uneven and risky and costly. Thomas' question speaks our truth, "How will we know the way?"

So today we not only celebrate that Augustana became home; we remember and celebrate the way. Obviously this occasion is a celebration of the classes you passed. Let it also be a celebration of the classes and concepts that confounded you, the questions and papers you thought you'd never find a way through... perhaps as recently as Thursday night! To call Augie home is about more than classes: it's about care—both the care you've received and the care you've given. Let today's celebration both speak the promise and truth of God. The promise is there will be a way. The truth is the way is risky, costly, and bumpy. It was even for Jesus. Let our celebration say that questions serve faith. Learning about every part of God's creation is part of the way. And through questions and promises, learning and faith God help us find a way to make the world home—spacious and gracious for you and for others.

I once asked a student if she had a metaphor for graduation. She said, "It's like I've come to the edge of my map. I've known my whole life I would go to college. . . . from kindergarten on this was mapped out. Now it's like I don't have a map."

Do we not live Thomas' question: how shall we know the way? To proclaim Jesus as way means many different things to Christians. To some, this very day, it means the

world will end. Since Augustana named the day commencement, I am going to argue the way is the world's beginning. To some, it means that from the various ways on the map, sometimes called ways up the mountain, you choose the Jesus way. But for those who don't have a map, I believe the promise means God makes a way. And in the service of God's vision of home, with many rooms and place for all, I want to press that the way of Jesus is not merely our finding our individual ways, but our participating in God creating new home, new peace, new safety and belonging for all.

The first word about Jesus is that he came to make earth his home. To speak and live the promise of God for a fearful, anxious, tight and closed world that resisted him even then. The second word is that his was a way of costly trust: he kept giving, trusting, loving even when it cost his life. Easter promises that this way is a way of life.

How shall we illustrate this?

I notice that when folks in the Bible are trying to find their ways or groping for God to make a new way, they often speak of Egypt, remembering Israel's days in bondage and God's mighty deliverance through the Red Sea. Augustana had its own Egypt experience this year: perhaps remembering Egypt will again help us trust and see Jesus making a way.

The band was touring Egypt in January. One concert left in Cairo, everything going just according to the map—except perhaps the fire of hepatitis--when the people of Egypt decided Mubarek's power had gone on long enough. The resistance mushroomed—and while top priority for everyone was the band's safety—they weren't home and it wasn't clear how or when we'd get them here.

Even that much and it's clear it wasn't merely the band that was in bondage. You were in a five star Cairo resort, 80 degree temps and a gorgeous pool. All of us who love you were bound somewhere between CNN newscasts and the silence where once we'd enjoyed your emails and texts. There are lots of reasons it was a chilly bondage for us. We needed a new way home, too. Isn't it clear that the way of freedom was not as simple as you, or any of us, deciding to bring you home? The way for you, like the Israelites, was a whole network of questions and responses and decisions with your teachers who were with you, Augie administration here, networked with the US Senate and executives at the airlines. . . . all of these somehow buoyed along by more prayers and hope and concern than we can count.

Then before we got you home, we heard dozens of others stories of countless other folks also studying and now stranded in Egypt. We couldn't rest until you were home. . . and that web of care only had integrity until we also prayed that all others would be home. . . that somehow God would make a way, room, space. And when you arrived home, you expanded the way even more—you led us in prayer for your new friends in Egypt seeking home—justice and freedom and belonging. The gracious care you experienced between Christians and Muslims still gives us new imagination of God's house of many rooms.

Is this not a picture of the Jesus' way—God pushing us out of our maps and freeing a whole lot of people to give whatever we have so that we find the way home together?

The Bible tells this story—and then it remembers it every time people faced a crisis, a roadblock, a dead end. They remembered Egypt when they were bound in Babylon, again under Cyrus of Persia, again under Ezra and Nehemiah and then again under Herod.

The Gospel promises a place for us—welcome home! And a call for us—to participate in making the way to belonging for all. The Bible remembers all the challenges of the way to empower us to persevere, to serve, and to delight in the journey. Remember these ways—freshman year, Egypt, crisis to serve your courage and faith in each new way to a new sense of home.

One more bit of good news. Augie will always be home. There is a reason we call that great weekend in October Homecoming! I promise you we'll put up our arms to say "Welcome home!" And the only thing more fun than that will be to say, "And how is it going on the way? Where are you given space and grace and freedom? And how are you creating it for others. This is the way of Jesus, it's true, and it's life. Amen.