I want to congratulate the homecoming committee on another fun and invigorating theme. I love the Olympics . . . and am more than happy to “Go for the Blue and Gold” with you!

I actually feel somewhat qualified to preach since I’ve been at an Olympics. No, we didn’t get to London this summer. And we weren’t in LA or Atlanta or Lake Placid either. Where Vikings are concerned, Susan and I actually got to go to THE Olympics—Lillehammar, 1994. The events were magnificent, the excitement indescribable. Beyond the athletes, the world was captivated by Norway’s hospitality—the street vendor selling maps of Scandinavia without Sweden may be an exception. And the scenery was breathtaking. If you don’t yet love winter, go to Norway.

I’m here to tell you, blue and gold Olympians, the Olympics in Norway give new meaning to “a great day to be a Viking!”

Choir breaks in with first line of Ya Vi Elsker while I wave the flag!

I’m pretty sure that was idolatry, but since it’s Norway I’ll probably get away with it!

I was getting very pumped at how Lillehammer would help me preach this morning. Then I realized that many of this year’s first year students were born in 1994. How can this be? Somehow the names Bonnie Blair, Bjorn Dahle, Michele Kwan, Vegard Ulvang, and Oksana Baiul just aren’t household words for them? What can people know of grace who haven’t seen Torval and Dean skate? Who could be a Viking and not have heard Norway’s apologies for winning so many medals as the host team? Norway won 26—more than any other nation, and exactly double the number won by the United States. But that’s enough idolatry.

So if we imagine the children coming to Jesus as Olympians, are going for the blue and gold, what will this help us see?

Let’s try some examples. Dan Jansen is an American speed skater who made his Olympic debut in Calgary in 1988. Favored in both 500 and 1000 meter events, Jansen learned the morning of his first race that his sister, Jane, had died of leukemia. The race began, he darted into the lead and then on a turn slipped and fell. In the 1000 M race he began at record breaking speed but fell again. After Calgary he won world championships, set records, and won award after award for sportsmanship, compassion, and spirit. Though he entered the 92 Olympics in Albertville as the clear favorite, the medals eluded him. At Lillehammar the 500 M race was first; he finished 8th.
Finally in the 1000 M race of his 3rd Olympics, Dan Jansen prevailed and one a gold Medal. Does Jesus not bless him for his mistakes as well as his medal?

The biggest difference between being at an Olympics and watching it on television is that when you are there you see the whole field of competitors. The broadcast may show us 5 or 6 competitors. . . and they’re almost always the ones in contention for a medal. When you attend you get to see 25, 30 and more. And I saw 2 things. The first is that all of them are brilliant. Skilled and practiced and focused and strong. The day we saw downhill skiing I think there were 33 or 34 competitors. . . and the whole range of them were separated by a matter of seconds. They are all brilliant.

One sees that they are all brilliant and one sees that lots of them make mistakes. As one British newscaster put it, spending a lot of time with more than your feet on the ice. There is something compelling about the way giving it your all in this one, highly charged moment makes one vulnerable to slipping. I so admire the freedom, the drive, and the sheer humanness of making a mistake.

Dan Jansen is but one example of how brilliant and broken children are not in separate lines. It isn’t like the medallists get an express line to Jesus’ blessing and the mistaken are stuck back somewhere behind security. The athletes—and the children of God—are one and the same. Geniuses who error, the broken who are blessed. Which is only to say, of course, that Jesus blesses real children, real people.

Then let’s consider the cross country relay teams from Finland, Italy and Norway. Somehow 12 guys hanging out with Jesus seems like just the right number. In his leg of the race, Mika Myllala from Finland broke his ski pole. No Viking should claim an International relations major without knowing that when he passed a Norwegian coach who refused to give him his extra pole, Finland threatened to break diplomatic ties with Norway! The race continued. The legendary Bjorn Dahle anchored the Norwegian team. He is phenomenal, but the Italians were primed. . . and in the last seconds of the race inched ahead to win by .04 of a second. The rivalry continues decades later.

I tell the story in hopes that it helps us see that the blessing of Jesus moves into all the intensity of competition. Education majors know well that blessing a group of children is complicated. The power of cooperation and competition, selfishness and generosity, sharing and refusing are persistent among children of all ages. The gift at the center of Christian faith is that the Incarnate Jesus enters and lives among all the complexity and reaches out to bless.

Lest we neglect the scoffers in Mark’s Gospel I simply need to say the names Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan. Haven’t heard those names for awhile, have we? Anybody feel any scoffing impulses???? Students, Harding and Kerrigan were both skaters for the US. In one of the most scandalous episodes in Olympic history, Harding participated in a plot for a hit man to strike Kerrigan in the knee with a crow bar about a month before Lillehammar. It is one thing to
say the blessing touches the brilliant and the broken, rivals and competitors. It’s another to note Mark’s clarity by the 10th chapter that Jesus is moving toward facing the world’s violence. There is no reading of the Gospel that would withhold Jesus’ blessing from the broken—even or maybe especially the violently broken.

I hope it is becoming clear that this sermon is not so much about Olympic athletes. I hope it is clear that this text is not merely about children, it is about the world, the real world as it is—divided, violent, and terrified. Is this not true of your classmates here at Augie? The whole range of you are brilliant—the brightest and the best. And we all make mistakes, some of them grievous. The power of the Gospel is that Jesus comes to bless and will not let the scoffers stop him. If the irony of learning—that we often learn the most from our mistakes—is true of the Olympics, surely it can be true here as well.

I love it if this Olympic theme presses the blessing of Jesus with all the diligence of world class athletes, pumping, stretching, pounding, and racing to love and to bless. Both to be blessed and to bless, all scoffing aside.

My all time favorite Olympic story would have to be the first time the women’s marathon was run, Los Angeles 1984. Gabriela (“Gaby”) Andersen-Schiess ran the event as a member of the Swiss team. The ’84 Olympics were run in sweltering, oppressive heat. As Gaby entered the stadium, the crowd gasped in fear. She staggered onto the track, her torso twisted, her left arm limp, her right leg mostly seized. The effects of heat exhaustion were obvious, but Gaby waved away medical personnel who rushed to help her, knowing that, if they touched her, she would be disqualified. The Coliseum crowd cheered her on as the final lap took her five minutes and 44 seconds and then she fell across the finish line. She finished 37th, ahead of seven other runners. Medical personnel tended to her immediately and, miraculously, she was released two hours later. The horror of the scene allowed the whole world to see how ridiculous were the rules about touching an injured athlete. . . and they were changed quickly.

I want to conclude with the hope that the blessing of Jesus continue to be a game-changer. Jesus persistently insists on blessing across rules, laws, categories, and distinctions—because people and most especially children are gasping to survive beneath them. Then and now he touches and blesses the untouchable. One of the gifts of an alumni reunion is an opportunity to reach beyond whatever barriers have persisted. There is something about the way blessings and brokenness fall on us overtime that shifts our trust in rules. . . and I hope opens us to more trust in blessing and grace. We’re called out of scoffing and back into the innocence of being children—as complicated as that is.

The bad news is that anything that gets in the way of God’s gracious, healing blessing is idolatry. The good news is Jesus’ steadfast refusal to be stopped until you and your neighbors, until your teammates and all the rivals around you, until the world knows that it is loved. Thanks be to God in the name of Jesus whose faithful persistence makes it so. Amen.
Prelude

“Crown Imperial March”

William Walton (1902-1983)

Augustana College and Community Orchestra

President Rob Oliver

Welcome

Proceessional Hymn

“Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee”

Joyful, joyful we adore thee, God of glory, Lord of Love!

Hearts unfold like flow’rs before thee, praising thee, their sun above.

Melt the clouds of sin and sadness, drive the gloom of doubt away.

Given of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day.

All thy works with joy surround thee, earth and heav’n reflect thy rays,

stars and angels sing around thee, center of unbroken praise.

Field and forest, vale and mountain, flow’ry meadow, flashing sea,

chanting bird, and flowing fountain call us to rejoice in thee.

Thou art giving and forgiving, ever blessing, ever blest,

well-spring of the joy of living, ocean-depth of happy rest!

Thou our Father, Christ our brother, all who live in love are thine;

teach us how to love each other, lift us to the joy divine!

Invocation

L: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

C: And also with you

Kyrie – The congregation responds to each petition, “Lord, have mercy”

Hymn of Praise

“For the Beauty of the Earth”

For the beauty of the earth, for the beauty of the skies,

for the love which from our birth over and around us lies:

Chorus: Christ, our God, to thee we raise this our sacrifice of praise.

For the wonder of each hour of the day and of the night,

hill and vale and tree and flow’r, sun and moon and stars of light: Chorus

For the joy of ear and eye, for the heart and mind’s delight,

for the mystic harmony linking sense to sound and sight: Chorus

For the joy of human love, brother, sister, parent, child,

friends on earth and friends above; for all gentle thoughts and mild: Chorus

For each perfect gift of thine, peace on earth and joy in heav’n;

for thyself, best gift divine, to our world so freely giv’n: Chorus

Prayer of the Day

L: The Lord be with you

C: And also with you.

L: Let us pray.

C: God of love and blessing, you call us your children and make us your own. Bless our love for you and for one another - at Augustana, in all the places you call us to serve, and in your whole creation. Give us peace in your blessing, make us vigorous in loving one another as you have loved us, and send us anew as your instruments of justice and hope. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen
SCRIJTUE
Hebrews 1: 1-4, 2:10-13
Psalm 8

ANTHEM
“Children of the Heavenly Father”
arr. Paul J. Christiansen
Alumni Choir

GOSPEL
Mark 10:13-16:

SERMON
“Blessed Children”
Pastor Paul Rohde

HYMN
“Lord of All Hopefulness”
Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy, whose trust, ever childlike, no cares could destroy:
be there at our waking, and give us, we pray, your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.

Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith, whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe:
be there at our labors, and give us, we pray, your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.

Lord of all kindliness, Lord of all grace, your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace:
be there at our homing, and give us, we pray, your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.

Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm, whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm:
be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray, your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.

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PRAYERS
Sung Prayer Response, “Come and Fill our Hearts with Your Peace”

OFFERING
“Komm Süßer Tod”
Johanne Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
arr. Leopold Stokowski
Augustana College and Community Orchestra

HOLY COMMUNION
L: The Lord be with you
C: And also with you
L: Lift up your hearts
C: We lift them to the Lord
L: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God
C: It is right to give God thanks and praise

EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

LORD’S PRAYER
DISTRIBUTION
All who believe in Christ’s presence are invited to commune. Those who desire a blessing may fold their arms across their chest. We distribute by stations: receive the bread and dip it into the wine. Grape juice and gluten free wafers are available at stations with two chalices.

“Praise to the Lord” arr. F. Melius Christiansen Augustana Choir

“Empty Branches, Crystalline Grace” by Deanna (Levsen) Wehrspann, ‘80 Augustana Orchestra

BLESSING

CHORAL BENEDICTION “God, Be With You Til We Meet Again” Augustana Choir

DISMISSAL
L:  Go in peace, serve the Lord.
C:  Thanks be to God.

CLOSING HYMN “On Our Way Rejoicing”
On our way rejoicing gladly let us go. Christ our Lord has conquered; vanquished is the foe. Christ without, our safety; Christ within, our joy; who, if we be faithful, can our hope destroy?

Refrain: On our way rejoicing: as we forward move, hearken to our praises, O blest God of love!

Unto God the Father joyful songs we sing; unto God the Savior thankful hearts we bring; unto God the Spirit bow we and adore, on our way rejoicing now and evermore.  Refrain

POSTLUDE Movement IV ("Allegro ma non troppo") from Symphony no. 8 in G Major, op. 88 Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904) Augustana College and Community Orchestra

Preacher Rev. Dr. Paul H.W. Rohde, Loken Endowed Chair for the Campus Pastor
Presiding Minister Rev. Ann Elizabeth Rosendale, ’04, Campus Pastor
Lectors Kristina Johnson, ’13, Sanna Horsley, ’13, Viking Day Chairs
Crucifer Brooke DeJong, ’13
Banner Bearer Kade Klippenstein, ’14
Christ Candle Bearer Anna Bahnsen, ’14
Torch Bearers Michael Seeley, ’13
Mandy Seeley, ’13
Book Bearer Andrew Paulson, ’14
Communion Distributors & Ushers Viking Days Committee & Faculty Members
Augustana Orchestra Dr. Christopher Stanichar, conducting
Augustana Choir Dr. Paul Nesheim, conducting

You are welcome to attend a Homecoming Brunch in the Morrison Commons, starting at 11:30 am. The cost is $10.00 for adults, $5.00 for children twelve and under, with tickets available at the door.

This morning's offering supports Augustana campus ministry and service learning travel.