

Augustana College
Chapel of Reconciliation

Salvation and its Obligations

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Scripture Acts 4:32-35 and Matthew 13:24-30

Acts 4:32-35

32 Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. 33 With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 34 There was not a needy person among them, **for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold.** 35 They laid it at the apostles' feet, and **it was distributed to each as any had need.**

He is risen? (He is risen indeed.)

Happy Easter to you and grace and peace from our Lord Jesus Christ.

I want to make two points today. First, Jesus' death and resurrection assures that you have eternal life. This is good news. Second, Jesus' death and resurrection means you have obligations to your neighbors. This is the sort of news that makes the rich man in the Gospel walk away in despair. Embrace the contraction in my message today. Let me start with the Good News.

Parable of the Wheat: We all are Saved

Many of us here are Lutherans. We do not engage in do-gooder actions like Community Service Day in an attempt to buy a proverbial stairway to heaven with our good works. We know, especially in this season of Easter, that our place in heaven is assured through the innocent suffering and death of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is the grace of GOD that preserves us, not anything we do.

Matthew 13:24-30 is very clear on this.

24 . . ."The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; 25 but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. 26 So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. 27 And the

slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' 28 He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' 29 But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. 30 Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

My friend, Gary Nesdahl, published a meditation on this in the *Argus Leader* last September. He said this, "One day I made an amazing discovery. I realized that all that starts as wheat stays wheat. The weeds that are sown are not transformed wheat, or wheat that hasn't lived up to its potential. We are what Jesus planted. The enemy cannot change that. We cannot, through ignorance or miscalculation, change that. Wheat cannot become weeds. It is what it is."

My atheist father died last October. In Gary's words I hear good news for his prospects of eternal life. I hope you too hear the good news. You are all wheat and a gift of eternal life has been assured for you.

The Jesus Movement and Its Ethic

Now to my second point which has far less good news for the rich among us. I am talking to you.

Today's primary Gospel reading from Acts refers to an incident occurring in the period following Jesus' death and resurrection. Peter and John are preaching and healing and the Christian church is growing. Earlier in Chapter 4 of Acts it says the number of believers had reached 5,000. The rulers, elders and scribes are not happy with this growing movement and they tell John and Peter to stop. However, given that we're all here having this conversation 2,000 years later, obviously they didn't stop. In fact, those who did believe and professed their faith appear here to have adopted a particular ethic. Perhaps it was this subversive ethic that disturbed the elites in power and led them to try and stop this radical Jesus movement.

Listen again, "for as many owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold." One fair paraphrase of this would be that "Each gave according to their ability." Similarly, the proceeds of what was given was "distributed to each as any had need." Again a fair paraphrase of this would be that "each received according to their need." So there you have the Apostolic ethic paraphrased in one easy phrase, "For each according to

his ability, to each according to his need.” Or to be gender inclusive, “For each according to their ability, to each according to their need.”

In principles of economics, I generally ask my econ 120 students which American historical document makes this statement. Hands go up and I write their guesses on the board—the US Constitution, Bill of Rights, Declaration of Independence, and sometimes a few others. We then vote on them. Usually the Declaration of Independence wins. (Unsaid: It’s actually from Karl Marx’s *Critique of the Gotha Program* written in 1875, but published in 1891 after his death in 1883.) You can Google it later if you don’t know where it appears.

And I suppose it doesn’t really matter what the source is, clearly the author of Acts is one of the early statements of this ethical sentiment.

Throughout the Gospel we are told to love our neighbors as ourselves. There’s nothing there about *tolerating* them; we’re commanded to love them. We’re told to be good Samaritans, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give drink to the thirsty. There was no discussion about whether one needs to check to see if the person in need has the proper documentation or even the usual sexual orientation. Similarly there was no call for cost benefit analysis. It’s simply a command to care for the needy among us. In short, we are supposed to share our GOD given talents and property based on our ability. We are to give to those depending on their need. I believe GOD means this.

But here’s the troubling news. You have tremendous gifts of intellect, passion, ambition, wealth, connections, power, and the ability to simply get things done. If you didn’t have these, you would not be sitting in this room. All of these gifts, including all of your possessions, were given to you by GOD. But these gifts also came with their opposite. You have obligations in this world. GOD expects Christians like you and me to give according to what we have first been given to meet the world’s needs—and these unfortunately my friends are many. Let me remind you of a few of these needs at the local, national, and international level.

Needs

In this town of Sioux Falls, The Banquet, our local soup kitchen, serves 300-400 people every night. Many of these people have nowhere else to go and many of them are children. Hunger is a need. Homelessness is a growing problem in Sioux Falls. Hundreds of people are outside, in shelters, or other places where the police would prefer them not to be. Housing is a need.

At the national level poverty, especially among children, is a persistent structural problem of our society. In 2003, 18% of children lived in households earning less than the poverty line. Our rich country had about 45.8 million people without health insurance in 2004. People need access to an income that will sustain them as well as to medical care.

Globally, our world is deeply unequal. On our planet of 6 billion people, half get by on less than \$2 per day. A little less than a billion get by on less than a dollar. These are the people the press talks about as extreme hunger. Among the world's poor are the approximately 30,000 children under the age of 5 who will die today of hunger and preventable disease. That's about 10-11 million per year.

Given your abilities and given these needs, we need to have a faith that calls us to action—not one that puts us to sleep. We must have a faith that encourages us to give from each according to our abilities and to each according to their needs.

The Good News is that you are saved. Your salvation is assured. Now that you have that out of your way, GOD asks you to use your Christian freedom and your time at this wonderful place to discern the answer to this question: Where do your deepest passions and abilities meet the world's greatest needs? Where do your deepest passions and abilities meet the world's greatest needs?

You are free to do consider this, because as I said at the beginning—He is Risen. (He is risen indeed.)

Amen

HOLY COMMUNION
Wednesday, April 26, 2006

Prelude *“Come, You Faithful, Raise the Strain”* James Biery
Tim Gabriel, Organist

Easter announcement

P: Christ is Risen!

C: **Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

Welcome and announcements

Invocation

Prayer of the Day

Hymn *“Christ is Alive! Let Christians Sing”*
LBW #363, vv 1-3

Scripture Acts 4: 32-35

Sermon Reynold Nesiba, Economics

Hymn *“Christ is Alive! Let Christians Sing”*
LBW #363, vv. 4-5

Prayers of the Church

Holy Communion

Blessing & Benediction

Postlude *“Come, You Faithful, Raise the Strain”* James Biery

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Outreach end of the year party/pre-Cinco de Mayo party!!

The party will be Sunday, *April 30 from 7:00-8:00 p.m.* in the Chapel. All current Outreach participants and students interested in Outreach for next year are invited to strike the pinta, enjoy a festive nacho bar, learn the tango, and celebrate the awesome ministry of Outreach!!

CHAIR OF MORAL VALUES - Next **Thursday (April 27) at 10 AM** in the Back Alley we will hold the last of this year's community discussion fora (or is that forums?). Faculty and students from Augustana's Department of Business Administration will lead a community discussion of understanding Matthew 25:31-46 in the context of the modern world of business. All are welcome to this event.

COMMUNITY SERVICE DAY - Sat., April 29th.

What can Ole do for you? On Saturday, April 29th Augustana will be delivering service to the Sioux Falls community on Community Service Day. You can still join in! Contact Karina Stander at x5415 to sign up.

CHAPEL SCHEDULE

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| Thursday (27) | Chair of Moral Values discussion - Back Alley - 10 am |
| Friday (28) | Worship, 10 am - Aaron Graumann, Sr. Speaker |
| Sunday (30) | Worship, 11 am - Sarah Sumner-Eisenbraun |
| Monday (1) | Worship, 10 am - Gary Earl, Chem.; Brass Choir |
| Tuesday (2) | Roman Catholic Mass - Fr. Michael Griffin, CTK parish |
| Wednesday (3) | Holy Communion, 10 am - Anna Madsen, Reli; Collegiate Chorale |
| Friday (5) | Worship, 10 am - Angie Hummel, Sr. Speaker; Faculty Recognition award |
| Sunday (7) | Worship, 11 am - Pr. Paul |