

**Augustana College  
Chapel of Reconciliation**

**Imagined Communities**

**President Rob Oliver**

**11 September 2006**

Proverbs 3:29

Do not plan evil against your neighbor who dwells trustingly beside you.

Luke 10:25-37

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? How do you read?” And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have answered right; do this, and you will live.”

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed mercy on him.” And Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

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**Imagined Communities**

Good Morning!

As I contemplated speaking today, I reviewed the scripture references that were suggested for today and then relied on

the guidance of the Holy Spirit to tell me what I should talk about. Most of the time my experience has been that the Holy Spirit does indeed provide guidance and inspiration—providing of course that we are open to its intervention into our busy lives—BUT, what is required of us is to engage our minds and our hearts in the endeavor. You recall the admonition: God helps those who help themselves. Well, I tried to listen, but it just wasn't coming ...

So ... a sub-lesson from today's homily is that God won't write your homily for you—or write your papers, or your lectures, or study for your test for you! (I do believe that He will assist you if you give it your best effort, however).

As I thought more deeply and listened to what was on my mind and in my heart I discovered that what I felt compelled to share with you today had little to do with the suggested scripture readings for today, so those that you just heard read were ones that Pastor Paul gave me permission to choose.

What I had been thinking about is the beginning of our academic year together, and thus the coming together of the “Augustana community,” as we often refer to ourselves. Of course the other rather obvious input to my thinking is that today is September 11<sup>th</sup>, a reason to think deeply about the affairs of the world today.

So it is the notion of community and of differing communities of the world that drew me to both choose the scripture verses and the source material for my topic today.

Some of you are familiar with the work of Benedict Anderson, who wrote *Imagined Communities—Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. So first, of course I owe credit to Professor Anderson for the title of my comments today.

Let's begin by engaging our imaginations a little right now, individually and collectively.

I want you to imagine a picture of the world—now whether you do that as a globe or as a two dimensional map that has unfurled its roundness onto a flat surface doesn't matter—I just want you to imagine a picture our world in your mind.

Have you got it?

Now, which one is it that you are imagining? Which one are you looking at? I can see from the looks on your faces that you are want to tell your new President in the kindest of terms—there is only one, Rob.

To the point of the question: Are you conceiving the picture of the world that includes the oceans and the land masses, mountains and deserts, coastal regions and inland areas bisected by rivers and mountain ranges, forests and plains? Are you thinking of perhaps a photo of this orb as might have been taken from a spacecraft orbiting the earth? In that picture colors might delineate altitudes or areas of vegetation, snow and ice, or of desolate areas where life is

scarce. Are you seeing that world? Is this image perhaps as close as we can get to as God created it?

Or ... are you seeing the picture of the world that includes blocks of colors which are intended to delineate political boundaries established by man—you know, some are yellow, some green, some blue, pink, purple and so on? Some are large, like the United States, or China, or Russia. Some share boundaries with other entities that are easily understood, and have not changed in recent history, yet many are small, and their borders may change from time to time. Is this picture you are envisioning perhaps the world as Man has defined it? Or perhaps defiled it?

You see it is the same world, but it looks quite different depending on how it is that you are imagining it to be.

Here is where I want to turn to Anderson's work:

Anderson defines Nations as

“Imagined political communities,

And (further) imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”

Let's dissect this a little further—

Imagined

(He writes)

“Members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”

“All communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined.”

“Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.”

For example, we in the United States have even gone so far as to imagine our nation as one that is “one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” As Americans we imagine that we are all equal under the eyes of the law, and under God’s eyes, are we not? Certainly we have imagined that to be true; and we suggest that our systems are created and managed toward that ideal.

### Imagined as Limited

“Even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite [, if elastic] boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind.”

So somewhere there is a line, which delineates ours from theirs. The areas get progressively smaller, with the United States having divided itself and its citizens further into 50 states, and in South Dakota with 66 counties, hundreds of cities and towns, and so on.

And we know that there are differences: Those people from Iowa somehow haven’t learned to drive like the

rest of us, right? On an international level, those people from Mexico haven't learned how to organize themselves and their economy like the US and Canada have, have they? What is wrong with them? And of course, then there is the Middle East ...

### Imagined as Sovereign

“It is imagined as sovereign because ... nations dream of being free, and, if under God, directly so. The gage and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state.” Sovereign ... free ... from whom or what? Perhaps from your neighbor's rule or oppression? From those people on the other side of the line?

### Imagined as Community

“It is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.”

Again, we conceive in our minds that these people that reside within the boundaries that we have created are somehow like us, and somehow unlike those who reside on the other side of “the line.” That is, “they” are *different*.

What is an astounding and disturbing feature about this image of community is described further by his statement:

“It is this fraternity (between the members) that makes it possible ... for so many millions of people, not so

much to kill, (but) as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.”

A question for us to ponder: Is your imagined community so strong, so clearly defined, so different from that of other communities in the globe, that you would be willing to kill, or to die, for it?

When we put it into those terms, it suggests that the power of the human mind to conjure up something, and to nurture it and support it with systems and values and actions over time, is rather overwhelming.

Here the words of Proverbs might weigh in for us to heed:

“Do not plan evil against your neighbor who dwells trustingly beside you.”

And, are we not commanded to love our neighbors as ourselves?

Then there is that question from our Gospel reading today for us to contemplate more deeply—It is that question from the lawyer:

“And who is my neighbor?”

The story of the Good Samaritan suggests that our neighbor is the one on the other side of that line. It is the one who is different than I am, different that we are. **DIFFERENT!**

Now clearly some of those neighbors are different in ways that are easier for us to understand and to therefore build tolerance for. Others are not. What the scripture is telling us

is that we should seek to love all of our neighbors, including and perhaps especially, those that are the most difficult and challenging for us to love.

Now we have all heard this before, and we now are enlightened by Anderson to think more deeply about “our imagined community” versus someone else’s, and we know that if we THINK differently, perhaps we can begin to perceive ourselves as citizens of the world rather than merely citizens of our nation, to transcend our color blocks and consider the world as God created it.

But this is really hard to do—hard to operationalize in our daily lives. How might I as one individual among billions in the world make a difference?

Perhaps we need to begin right here, close to home—right here at Augustana. Students need to begin by considering their neighbors in the dorm rooms next door or across the hall. Faculty need to consider those from different departments, and different buildings. Administrators and staff members need to think of those that are in different roles each day, but all working to build a community right here.

In the Augustana community, clearly we have great differences. We all know those art folks are different, right? And those scientists that spend time with test tubes and petri dishes, how different is that? We have folks that like to speak in different languages, and those that like to argue

the merits of different economic and political models, and on and on.

What a wonderful diversity exists right here. Let's use our imaginations again: Imagine looking down on this campus as you might from a hot air balloon drifting above, or ... as God might look down upon us. The only lines I am seeing are the concrete walkways that serve to CONNECT us all, not lines or fences that would divide us. Similarly, we are not divided from the Sioux Falls community, but the streets both lead us to this campus every day also connect us with those around us, encouraging us to interact and engage with our neighbors in as many ways as we can.

I believe the scriptures are clear to us all: Let us be a community, one that shares values, and caring attitudes toward each other, one that learns together and celebrates each other. Benedict Anderson's writings suggest that we have the power in our minds to imagine a community any way we chose to do. Let us imagine one in which we reach out to our neighbors both near and far, and engage with them. Let this be a place that both practices and preaches understanding and mercy toward each other and our neighbors, wherever and whenever we may encounter them.

Perhaps this is how neighbors learn to dwell trustingly beside one another.

AMEN

**MORNING WORSHIP**  
**Monday, September 11 2006**

**Prelude** "Gigue Fugue" by J.S. Bach

**Welcome/Announcements**

**Invocation** Jan Brue Enright

P: 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.**

**Prayer** from "Awed to Heaven, Rooted to Earth"  
by Walter Brueggemann

**Hymn** "God who Stretched the Spangled Heavens" LBW #263

**Scripture** Proverbs 3:29  
Luke 10:25-37

**Sermon** "Imagined Communities" Rob Oliver  
Augustana President

**Hymn** "Blest Be the Tie that Binds" LBW #370

**Prayers**

**Lord's Prayer**

**Benediction**

**Postlude** "God, Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens"  
by Wilbur Held

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**OFFERING** - A portion of our offering for the month of September will be used to fund the meal that campus ministry is serving at the Banquet (the local soup kitchen) on Tues., Oct. 10<sup>th</sup>.

**KOINONIA** is a discussion group for any students considering seminary or a church vocation. It meets tomorrow and every “second Tuesday of the Month” at 10 here at the chapel.

**ACTIVITY FAIR** - Tuesday, September 12<sup>th</sup> - 4:30-6:30 pm. Stop by the campus ministry tables and learn about all the ways that you can serve.

**SERVICE LEARNING** helps us learn to walk with our neighbors toward a more just and peaceful world. Sign up in the chapel office or the activities’ fair Trips this year will include:

TWIN CITIES—fall break

NEW YORK CITY—interim break

PINE RIDGE, NICARAGUA, CHICAGO, AND THE GULF COAST—spring break!

**Ronald McDonald House Charities** of South Dakota is seeking volunteers for their largest fund raiser Taste of South Dakota. The event is September 23, 2006 starting at 11am until 11pm. For more information please contact Jess Winter at [jmwinter@ole.augie.edu](mailto:jmwinter@ole.augie.edu) or Ronald McDonald House at 336-6398.

### CHAPEL SCHEDULE

Tuesday	Morning Prayer -CIA House (2118 S. Summit Ave.), 7:30 am - Koinonia (those interested in church vocations, 10 am
Wednesday	Morning Prayer -CIA House (2118 S. Summit Ave.), 7:30 am - Holy Communion, 10 am - Pr. Paul
Friday	Worship, 10 am - Kara Wiechmann, Sr. Speaker - Outreach Team Leader Training - 5:30-8:00 pm (chapel)
Saturday	Outreach Ice cream Social - Frosh dorms, 3 pm - CIA Fall Kickoff and BBQ - Christ the King Church - (26 <sup>th</sup> & Lake) - noon
Sunday	Worship, 11 am - Chris Matson, Intern Pastor Frosh Jazz Choir - met at 10 am at the chapel to rehearse - Advocacy Retreat - Learn to speak on justice - 3-7 pm - 3-1 room