Scripture
Ephesians 2:8-10  We are God’s workmanship, created in God’s image to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
Ephesians 4:29-5:2 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you.

Stories of Forgiveness
How many of you have spent enough time in a place completely unfamiliar to you to be pushed to see the world in a whole new way? It could have been in South Dakota, elsewhere in the United States or outside of the U.S., depending on what location you call home-and where you need to be pushed from.

I had the privilege of spending a significant amount of time in South Africa, a country I have grown to love. Between 2004-2008, I was there six times for periods of 3-6 weeks. I was originally invited there to be a visiting lecturer at a historically white Afrikaans university. (The Afrikaans people came into power in the 1940’s and implemented the stringent rules for separation of the races known as apartheid.) F.W. De Klerk had been Chancellor at this university before he became the President of South Africa during the time when apartheid was ended and the transformation began. However, through my work on international education, I had also gotten to know Samson, a member of the Venda people of the province of Limpopo. Each time I went to South Africa, I spent half of my time in the world of white academics who were trying to learn how to live in a new society and half of my time with Samson, who was trying to show them how to do so. Both sets of experiences pushed me to see the world in a whole new way.

Samson represented so much of the new South Africa-a visionary, an entrepreneur, a fighter and a healer. Like Nelson Mandela, who taught his own illiterate jailors to read when he was incarcerated under terrible conditions on Robbin Island, Samson believed deeply in the power of education to transform; to bring about healing and prosperity to the country he loved. He built bridges between white and black elementary and secondary schools; between white and black universities; and between white and black churches. He now does this same bridge building in countries that have been torn apart by conflict across the African continent.

The season of Lent always makes me think of Samson, because his capacity to bring healing is a true product of grace-both his deep understanding of the grace of God
embodied in Christ’s sacrifice on the cross—but also the grace of having forgiven at high cost, just as in Christ, God forgave him.

Moses was Samson’s oldest son. Moses was 20, close to the same age as many of you in this chapel today. He went to work for a white farmer in order to earn money to study at university. He worked hard, had friends, didn’t come home all that often but stayed in touch, which probably sounds familiar to many of you. His parents loved him dearly.

As those of you who live on or near farms know, they can be dangerous places. One day Moses was in the wrong place at the wrong time and was run over by a tractor driven by the farmer. He wasn’t killed, but he clearly had internal injuries and needed medical help. Some of the other workers put him in the back of a pickup and went to the local hospital, which refused to treat Moses because he was black. Moses’ coworkers went from town to town trying to find a place that would treat him. They finally found a hospital that would treat a black person 200 miles from the farm and left Moses there. They had to get back to the farm. They couldn’t afford to lose their jobs. Unfortunately, it was too late. Moses died.

Because of the low value placed on black workers at this point in South Africa’s history, no one bothered to let Moses’ family know what had happened. After they hadn’t heard from him for a few days, Samson and Mavis, his wife, came to look for Moses. The farmer blew them off. “I have no idea what happened to him—the lazy bum probably wandered off.” Samson and Mavis knew better. They searched for days, checking every hospital in an ever-growing circle. Finally, 200 miles from where they began, they found Moses, a nameless body in the hospital morgue.

When Samson tells this story years later, the agony is still raw. As a parent myself, I can’t even bear to think about experiencing something like this. Samson talks eloquently about what it took to work through his pain and anger. How he shouted at God; how he let go of anger, only to have it wash over him in waves. But as he was walking through the valley of the shadow of death, Samson came face to face with Christ’s sacrifice; with the power of being saved by grace alone; with the message we read today with the command to forgive as God forgave him and all of us.

Samson chose to forgive the farmer who discarded his son like an old shoe after he ran over him; who never considered that this young man would have a family who deserved to know what happened to him. Samson went through the truth and reconciliation process with the farmer and publicly forgave him for killing his son.

However, Samson’s work of forgiveness did not stop there. He chose to work to transform a system that would allow a young man with so much promise to die unnecessarily. He chose to make connections between white and black systems and structures in the face of scorn and open dismissal and threats. He chose to respond to his white brothers and sisters with firm compassion and a persistent call to justice.
When I asked Samson how he could not only forgive but also choose to build bridges with the people who were indirectly and directly responsible for the death of his son, he said that he had to live the grace that he had received and that the power to forgive and to work toward healing was God’s calling for him. It was the work that God had prepared in advance for him to do. To be clear, Samson never made it sound easy. To forgive as God forgave us through Christ involves anguish; it involves praying so earnestly that our sweat is like drops of blood falling to the ground.

This is not cheap grace; to use the language of Dietrich Bonhoffer, it is very costly grace indeed. For Samson to live a life of discipleship meant working side by side every day with the people who established the system that killed his son and to persist in working toward change in spite of huge obstacles. He knew as Bonhoeffer did that grace is “a living word, ...as our comfort in tribulation and as a summons to discipleship, costly grace is the only pure grace, which really forgives sins and gives freedom to the sinner.” (The Cost of Discipleship. London: SCM Press Ltd, p. 47.)

Samson’s story was not the only story of grace and forgiveness that I heard in South Africa. I met Jonathan Jansen, the first black Dean in the historically white, Afrikaans University of Pretoria, who after being treated with contempt and disrespect by his white faculty, chose to literally wash the feet of his white colleagues. He is now the chancellor of another historically white university where he is working toward responsible reconciliation. His book “The Knowledge in the Blood” is a powerful read. I recommend it. I spent an afternoon facilitating a heated conversation between white and black faculty members from two universities forced to consolidate and heard a black faculty member say quietly but firmly, “We just want to be heard and to hear you. Let’s talk together, brothers and sisters.” I spent a day touring Robbin Island with a guide whose family had suffered greatly while he was incarcerated there, who chose to relive that pain day after day so that the story would never be forgotten or repeated.

Through my experience in South Africa with Samson and others I learned to see forgiveness and reconciliation in a whole new way; and learned a powerful answer to the question “How then shall we live?”

We shall live by grace, called to forgive and to heal, living in deep compassion and hope. What a calling and what an amazing gift.

Amen.

Susan Hasseler, Senior VP for Academic Affairs and Dean of the College
Worship Service
Monday, April 7, 2014

Prelude  Geoff Gunderson, guitar
Welcome/announcements
Invocation
Prayer
Hymn  Great God Your Love Has Called Us  ELW #358 vs 1, 2, 5
Scripture  Ephesians 2:8-10; 4:29-5:2  Kade Klippenstein '14
Music  Geoff Gunderson, guitar
Sermon  Stories of Forgiveness  Susan Hasseler  Academic Dean
Hymn  Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service  ELW #712
Lord’s Prayer
Benediction
Postlude  Prelude and Fugue in A minor by Johann Krebs  Marilyn Schempp, organ

WORSHIP SCHEDULE

Tues, April 8  Common Ground, 9 pm
Wed, April 9  Holy Communion, 10 am, Earl Sherburne & Brass Choir
Thurs, April 10  Catholic Mass & Stations of the Cross 12:00 noon
Fri, April 11  Worship Service, 10 am, Allie Hjerpe
Sun, April 13  Worship Service, 11 am  Catholic Mass, 8 pm
The **PROFESSOR’S BEST LECTURE SERIES** - next lecture will be given by **DRS PRESTON & GUBBELS** today - April 7 - at 3:00 p.m. in the 3-in-1 Room Morrison Commons. Their lecture is titled, “Technology and Reproduction: Where is the Ethical Line?” This presentation comes from the Capstone Course: Life's Cycles: Birth, Death and the History of Medicine. Gubbels and Preston will, using "clickers," ask challenging questions of the audience regarding the impact of technology on reproduction. Technology continues to make many advances with regards to reproduction, but with each step comes challenging ethical questions.

Interested students are invited to a two day **INTERFAITH CONFERENCE** at Augustana Rock Island June 1-3. Speakers include Eboo Patel and presiding bishop Elizabeth Eaton. No cost; transportation from Sioux Falls is included. If interested, see Pr. Paul or Pr Ann.