Good morning! First things first I need to thank a few people. Huge thank yous to Jenna, Reid and Ethan for helping out with the leading this worship, thank you to Dustin, Brittany, and Ethan again for providing beautiful music, thanks to Pastor Ann, Pastor Paul and Patty for helping me organize and plan everything, and, of course, thanks to each and every one of you for being here to support me this morning.

While I was reading the passage from Matthew 16 where Jesus confronts the disciples about who people say that the Son of Man is, I was reminded of one of my favorite Christmas movies of all time: Elf. Now, let me explain. I realized, as I read the conversation Jesus has with those gathered, and specifically Simon Peter, that it mirrors a conversation Buddy the Elf has with a fellow elf while building Etch-a-sketches for the coming Christmas. To provide a little bit of context for those who might not be familiar with the story, Buddy is not actually an elf. He is an orphaned human who is taken in by Santa's elves, growing up at the North Pole, all the while thinking he is an elf. However, Buddy starts to realize that he is different. He is significantly taller than the rest of the elves, he has a much lower voice (resulting in him being the only bass in the elf choir), and is much slower at making toys.

The conversation between Buddy and his fellow elf worker is about the fact that Buddy is not producing toys as fast as everyone else. Buddy has made 85 Etch-a-Sketches in one day, but unfortunately, he is still 915 off of the usual elf pace. Fed up with his incompetence, Buddy exclaims “Why don’t you just say it? I’m the worst toymaker in the world. I’m a cotton-headed ninny muggins.”

Now, some of you might be thinking that this was all just an elaborate way for me to say the
phrase “cotton-headed ninny muggins” in my senior sermon. And you would be right on the mark with that assumption. BUT, it actually ties in perfectly so bear with me. The unifying factor between Buddy’s conversation and the passage from Matthew’s gospel is that they are both concerned with being called something. Jesus asks his disciples “who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they respond with several answers. John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, other prophets. Buddy calls himself a “cotton-headed ninny muggins.” All of these names that are tossed around don’t actually hit the mark. They don’t truly define the person they are attached to. Jesus is not a prophet of older times, he is the Messiah, as Simon Peter points out. Buddy really isn’t a cotton-headed ninny muggins or the worst toymaker of all the elves. He is simply a human who is out of place. Being called something can have a profound transformation upon us, but it also has the ability to mask the truth.

So what are we called? I have been called many things over the years. Thomas, Tom, Tommer, Tomothy, Turm . . . Hey you, with the face, Common Ground Coordinator, Bro Forum Coordinator, Chapel President, Outdoorsman, Counselor, NSO Leader, Viking Guide, and, more recently, thanks to a couple of guys from this year’s Freshman class, “Fuchsia guy.” You can ask about that story later. So what does it all mean? All of these titles. Do they really get at who I am? Long story short, no. But up until recently, I thought the answer was yes. And, seeing since this is a senior sermon after all, I thought it would be fitting to reflect back on the past few years.

Rewind to Freshman Tom. I was excited to be in a new place and go on new adventures; to learn new things and open my mind to different ways of thinking and believing. I found myself standing on the first page of a new chapter to my entire life. And I … was … terrified. My biggest concern throughout my freshman year was caught up in what people would call me.

Would I be accepted? Would I be the weird guy? Will the Ultimate Frisbee team judge my level of skill or write me off simply because I am a Freshman? Will I find friends with the same interests? If I do find friends, will their friendship be genuine? Or will they complain about me behind my back? Will I
get a reputation for being on chapel staff and regularly attending worship 4 times a week? Will my professors think I’m intelligent enough for college? Ultimately, I was terrified of what people would call me. My fears were caught up in something completely trivial, an outside perception, with no grounds for truly knowing who I am. I was Buddy, completely insecure and lacking in confidence amongst all the other elves. At least that’s what it felt like. It seemed like the entire rest of the Augie world knew what was going on, and I was locked up in room 116 of Bergsaker doing nothing but worrying about whether or not the laughter at that joke I told had really been genuine 2 hours ago. I did not know what people were calling me and it scared me.

This fear of how others perceived me continued through my second year and into the start of my Junior year. For my good friends in the religion department, you’ve probably been waiting for this. It was in the first semester of my third year of college where I first encountered a man by the name of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

The class was a religion seminar and up until that point, I had found a new thing to worry about; whether or not everything I was thinking and/or doing was right. I had this burning desire to have the right answer to everything, especially when it related to religion and theology. And I was so scared that I would get through college and all along be thinking the wrong things. Which, of course, would result in people calling me wrong. I didn’t want that. But along came Dietrich, and my world was rocked for the better.

Bonhoeffer was a theologian and activist during the time of the Second World War. His theological works are centered in a restlessness and disdain for the way the world was. The German Church, at the time, had a tendency to compromise with the political powers that be for the sake of the survival of the church. Unfortunately, these compromises led to horrendous injustices. This led Bonhoeffer to writing The Cost of Discipleship. One of the main points of Cost of Discipleship can be summarized as “don’t waste all of your time worrying about what’s right or what’s wrong, just DO
SOMETHING!” Reading this and understanding it set me free in so many ways. I broke out of my shell of anxiety and found immense beauty in the reality of the world we exist in. I stopped doing classwork with the mindset of pleasing my professors so they didn’t think I was dumb, and instead worked in order to pursue what I was truly passionate about. I began to worry less, and started to simply “do” more.

In my newly discovered love for practical and applicable theology in a concrete world, my thoughts have turned back to what I am being called. But this time, with a new twist. Because I have realized that there is an incredibly important difference between what we are called and who God calls us to be.

Being called, whether it’s a name or title or any other form of label, is stagnant. It does not do anything but describe an aspect of an individual. That is why my fears from my first two years of college were so misplaced. Whatever I was being called, whether by myself or others, had no power over me, and it certainly did not reflect who I really was. Instead, who I am is who God calls me to be. That phrase alone speaks profoundly. God calls us to be, it ends with a verb, an action.

Bonhoeffer recognizes this call and understands it as something we cannot escape from. In his writings on the Sermon on the Mount, he draws great attention to the fact that Jesus says “you are the salt of the earth” and “you are the light of the world.” Notice, we are not told “you should be the salt of the earth” or “you should try your absolute hardest to be light.” We are simply called what we are: Salt and light, we can do nothing else but shine forth and be salty.

When Jesus says to Peter “I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.” He is not just naming him Peter, no. Action will follow; a community grounded in the same belief will be nurtured, because that is what Christ is calling Peter to be. God’s call comes to us and transforms us. When God speaks, God does. And when God calls us, God makes us new people who are moved to action. We are called to be.

This is why I chose to read from Matthew 6 today. It may seem like I am drawing from two
completely different passages, but for me, being told not to worry and being called go hand in hand.

Matthew 6 goes so much deeper than what a first read-through might produce. Jesus is not simply
talking about not worrying and being happy. That would be far too simple. If being told not to worry for
the sake of not worrying was all we needed to hear, those singing fish that you could mount on your wall
would have been far more popular in churches. Like I said, it goes deeper than the surface. The lilies of
the field will do what they do, and the birds will be fed. We don’t need to worry because God calls us,
transforms us, into active agents of her love and peace. We are called out into a concrete and tangible
world where service exists. We are grabbed by the hairs on our head and forcefully pulled out of the
world of titles and names and worrying about what people might think about us, and placed into a
reality where a welcoming smile, a shared meal, a new home built by strangers, and a worship
experienced behind prison walls make vast worlds of difference in the lives of those involved.

So, friends, stop worrying about getting things right. Let’s not get too caught up in trying to
figure out what we are supposed to do, or whether or not our actions are the best possible action to
take, or if we’ve only made 85 Etch-a-Sketches during the day. Instead, listen for who God is calling you
to be, and then be that. What else can salt do but be salty, right?

What we are called by others has nothing to do with the actions we are called to by God. This
insight is one of the biggest and most profound that I will take with me from my college years. I know
now that I do not need to worry about how I am perceived by others, I don’t need to worry about being
right, or about whether or not I am deserving of the titles I have, or if people would still like me if they
knew everything about me.

“But Tom you say that like it’s just all going to work out perfectly. Like everything is just going to
line up the way it should be.” I wish that were the case. We won’t always get it right on the first try, or
the second or third. This is my 5th time preaching in the chapel and I still have not figured out how to
write a sermon during the days leading up to the date I preach, instead of the night before. We will make
mistakes, it’s a basic truth of our lives. But Christ tells us that our primary concern should not be over whether or not we got it right. Because there is this beautiful thing called grace that always has our back. We will mess up, multiple times even, we might even lose our saltiness, acting in ways that are opposite of what we are called to be. But, the good news is, we are forgiven.

So as we stand looking over the edge ready to dive into another year here at Augustana, let’s remember that we don’t need to worry about what we are called, instead let’s listen for who we are called to be. Because once we are called, the actions will follow, and we will be transformed and made anew. Don’t worry, you are the salt of the earth. Be salty. Amen.
All are welcome to the C.I.A. KICK-OFF PARTY (Catholics in Action) on September 14th from 6:30-7:30 pm at the chapel. There will be pizza and ice-cream! So come as you are and let’s start of the year together!

Are you a STUDENT ATHLETE in fall sports? Be sure to attend worship on Monday, September 15 at 10am as we will bless and prayer for all fall sports teams and players.

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Augustana (SD) Campus Ministry
(Chorus) You make beautiful things
You make beautiful things out of the dust
You make beautiful things
You make beautiful things out of us
All around
Hope is springing up from this old ground
Out of chaos life is being found
In You (Chorus)

(Bridge) You make me new
You are making me new (Repeat)

Backpack Blessing
Sending
Sending Song “I am Free”

Postlude “I am Free” (reprise)

WORSHIP SCHEDULE
Sun, Sept 7 Worship Service, 11 am, Pastor Paul Rohde
Catholic Mass, 8 pm
Mon, Sept 8 Worship Service, 10 am, President Rob Oliver
Tues, Sept 9 Common Ground, 7:30 pm
Wed, Sept 10 Worship Service, 10 am, Pastor Ann Rosendale
Fri, Sept 12 Worship Service, 10 am, Jennifer Kvigne

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

ACTIVITIES FAIR next Tuesday, September 9th 5:00-7:30 p.m. Stop by the Commons Circle to sign up for all sorts of activities happening on campus this fall. Campus Ministry will have a table and our students and staff will be excited to meet you!

For those students exploring the possibility of youth ministry, education, counseling, or ordained ministry – KOINONIA meets Tuesday, September 9th at 10:00 a.m. in Pastor Paul’s office here in the chapel. Come check it out!

Rachael Anderson, one of the counselors at Sioux Falls Psychological Services, is creating two helping groups on campus for students and friends. Beginning September 9th on Tuesdays at 10:00 AM, HEALTHY CONNECTIONS GROUP will discuss relationships. Tuesdays, 5:30 PM, GRIEF & LOSS GROUP will support people in grief and those who seek to help them. Students are welcome to come as often as they wish. The groups meet in the Haugo Room - located in the Lutherans Outdoors Office which is connected to the chapel.

We have need for more MUSICIANS to help serve Sunday morning worship. Musicians serve twice a month. We are eager for both vocalists and Instrumentalists (piano, string and wind players). See Pastor Paul or Patty in the chapel office.

Looking for an alternative worship experience? You are warmly invited to attend COMMON GROUND WORSHIP Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m. in the chapel. Common Ground is centered around intentional community sharing in conversation, prayer, songs and a holy meal. We invite you to come! All are welcome.

Join an Outreach Team! OUTREACH TEAMS are a great way to meet new people, enjoy small group bible study and fellowship, and serve the local community. Teams travel to congregations in the area to lead youth lock-ins and Sunday morning worship services. Talk to Pastor Ann if you’d like to join a team.
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Lisa Gungor | Michael Gungor
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Backpack Blessing
Tom and Pastor Ann
Sending
Tom Gehring
Sending Song “I am Free”
New Squids on the Dock

Through You the blind will see
Through You the mute will sing
Through You the dead will rise
Through You all hearts will praise
Through You the darkness flees
Through You my heart screams I am free

Chorus: I am free to run I am free to run
I am free to dance I am free to dance
I am free to live for You I am free to live for You
I am free I am free

Through the kingdom comes
Through you the battle’s won
Through you I’m not afraid
Through you the price is paid
Through you there’s victory
Because of you my soul sings
I am Free (Chorus)

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Postlude “I am Free” (reprise)

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