

Carried to Grace, in memory of Dianne and Tracy

Mark 2: 1-12

Pr. Paul Rohde

Augustana Chapel

October 12, 2011

The first time I really talked to Dianne, I had received a phone call from the family of one of our students on UMAIE who was hospitalized abroad. They were requesting prayer. I thought, in case they called again, I should get some information. So I asked Dianne something innocuous like, “What do you know about this situation?” Several minutes later she had described the daily conversations she was having with the student, the student’s family, and the faculty member, the second opinion she’d arranged for the medical testing, what she was doing to arrange alternate transportation for the student and ways to keep the student and her group in touch. In the terms of the Gospel we just heard, I felt like Dianne had her hands on all 4 corners of the stretcher—and the student was in Australia.

I think there’s a sense in which we all know that Dianne and Tracy were utterly generous and gracious in the ways they carried students, colleagues, us. . . and then again I hear specific stories and realize we only begin to know . . . Last year in the midst of a number of students’ struggles, Tracy got to the place of admitting it was too much to carry. So she asked if we could meet to pray. We’d get together every few weeks. As she recounted the situations anonymously, of course, I heard again and again the depth her compassion and anguish and hope that we could help students do well and be well. And then we would pray because it was so abundantly clear the burdens were too much for her, for us, for any of us, to carry.

This text gives us two great gifts for the day: one is the power of the faith of friends. It is carrying and being carried. The second is the one to whom we carry each other, Jesus speaks the power to get up and move and live. It’s vitally important to me that we keep these two gifts together. Jesus looks on the faith of the friends. In an utterly individualized world where faith is often reduced to whether a person has it or not, this text raises our eyes to look at the people who carry us. Faith is not about us as individuals, and community is not merely about people we know or with whom we are intimate. The point is not that we carry—the burdens are so much larger than us. It is Jesus who speaks this forgiving, freeing, strengthening power. The two gifts: neighbors who carry to Christ who is present, meeting us and healing.

Without this Gospel I wouldn’t have thought of the word “grip” for Tracy and Dianne. Isn’t it a good word to describe the generosity and grace with which Tracy and Dianne served. It’s not merely that they had such firm and persistent grip, but they had so much joy in helping, knowing the great group of folks who move through this community, and trusting that God is present at every turn. Thank you for remembering their gifts. . . and taking time to give thanks for them. Thank you for adding your grip to carry the grief and whatever ways we may feel paralyzed together to Christ who lives for us and for the burdens of our world.

The text gives us these 2 gifts: the grip of faithful friends and the savior to whom we are carried. I think it also gives us a third—which is the muddy middle. I do not worry about the “grip” of Augustana. Care and compassion are so woven into this community I simply know it will continue to be there among us. I do worry about our capacity to take a turn on the stretcher. . . to stop, to feel, to know our need for each other and for God. There may be nothing as trusting or as healing as a pause. The Gospel is about both carrying and being carried. I could wish the Gospel gave us some clarity about how a community figures out who’s carrying and who’s being carried. One thing when our dear friends have cancer. . . another thing when everyone is facing and feeling the loss. That’s somehow very muddy and awkward to me.

I’m not sure I should even say this, but can you even imagine how many committee meetings it would take at Augustana to figure out which part of the roof to open, much less how to get stretchers up there??? Tracy dealt with students on roofs. And she would not be impressed by biblical support to go there! Grief is so like that.

I trust the Gospel of Christ Jesus to speak. Finally, forgiveness is true and a crucial gift in the freedom to be human. It is the power to move again and the truth of it will persist. But as I listen to the faith of young adults, it appears to me that the room is crowded, there are so many voices. How do we get through to connect with this transcendent one. And who are we to say that he has divine authority. Notice that question is in the text! This is somehow muddy; it helps me that the Gospel understands this.

I’m grateful for the Gospel’s words about the faith of friends carrying us because it inspires rest and being carried as well as carrying. I’m grateful for the Gospel’s candor about obstacles, because it inspires persistence until we receive a healing word and power to walk. And for the muddy middle, I’m grateful the Gospel is not merely about persistent people, but a persistent God—forgiving, healing, strengthening.

We will carry on. The legacies of these generous, gracious women will support us. . . and will continue to resound with the echoes of Gospel. I have on good authority that one of the librarians has Dianne’s secret recipe for shrimp for the Winter’s Tale in the library. Lots of us have learned lots of good questions from Tracy. . . where do you hurt? How can I support you making better decisions? I can’t imagine which of us will have the chutzpah to shout them at football games, “This is a great opportunity; make a good decision.” We are in it together and Jesus meets us, to forgive and teach us to walk anew.

Monday, September 12

Prelude

Welcome/Announcements

Invocation

Pastor Ann Pederson

Prayer

Hymn “*Beautiful Savior*”

ELW # 838

Remembrances

Rob Oliver, for the college

Bill Swart, for Dianne

Eric Bergman, '11 for Tracy

Scripture

Psalm 139, read responsively

Jake Bury, '12, ASA president

Mark 2: 11-12

Sermon

Pastor Paul Rohde

Hymn “*Amazing Grace*”

ELW # 779

Prayers of the People

Lord's Prayer

Benediction

Postlude

Invocation

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

Let us pray:

God of life and love, of cross and resurrection, we thank you today for the gifts of Tracy Riddle and Dianne Hammrich. For their love of you, their love neighbors and family, their love of Augustana, we give you thanks. Stir your spirit among us to sustain us in grief and bless us in gratitude. Amen.

Prayers of the People

God of light, we pray your presence and peace for all who grieve. Comfort and sustain Jay, Megan, Aaron and all of Dianne's family. Continue to surround and bless Tracy's mother, Phyllis, her brother, Gene and all their family. We especially thank you for all they made to feel like family. God in your mercy

God of community, we pray that you continue to stir gratitude at Augustana for the legacies of Tracy and Dianne. Help us remember the gifts of friendship, kindness, compassion, laughter, diligence, openness, and faith that each of them lived. Help us live the generosity and grace that you gave through them. God in your mercy.

God of all creation, we pray for global vision, for UMAIE, for women, especially those living in poverty in Latin America, and for our call to serve, God in your mercy.

God we pray for all who continue to live with cancer, for communities of care, for healing, and for hope. We pray for all who study and research treatments for cancer. . .especially the colleagues that do so here at Augustana. God in your mercy

God of wisdom, for both undergrads and lifelong students, we pray for the calling to teach and learn. We pray for the transforming gifts you call education, community and service. Call us anew, daily to live these callings wholeheartedly and joyfully. God in your mercy.

God of life, in a moment of silence help us believe and trust that you know even the needs for which we have no words. God in your mercy.

We give thanks for your promise to hear us, to sustain us, and to call us to live anew in your name. Amen.

Lord's prayer

Almighty God, creator, redeemer, and sustainer, bless you now and always.

Go in peace.