

# Miranda Anderson

## October 2, 2009

---

Music has always been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. As the daughter of two musicians, it was only inevitable that music would become such an influential part of my life. While I am not a music major here, I have found ways to stay involved whether it be through band, singing at Gloria Dei or now with chapel musicians.

I came into Augustana four years ago a little naïve. I came in knowing that I would be a religion major, but I had no idea what I was getting myself into. I was challenged. In high school, you're taught there's always a right answer. In college, and especially in the religion department, you find out more often than not, there are no right answers, just right questions. This frustrated me at first, but I soon began to thrive on the idea of asking questions.

It was only natural for me to bring music into the equation. Even when I was younger, music was what connected me to worship. I was a fairly attentive child, but there were times I lost concentration during worship. But I was always excited to participate in the hymns. Singing made me feel like I was contributing to the worship service. Here I was, elementary-aged and singing with every other member of the congregation. The rest of the service generally just floated on by, including the ten, even fifteen-minute prayers of the day that I never timed.

Music has often served as a bridge for my understanding, and this has remained true for my time here at Augie. My freshman year in honors religion, we read a book by Arthur Peacocke that greatly influenced how I approach theology. Using music as a metaphor, I began to explore seeing God as a jazz composer and creation as the chords to a jazz piece. This opened my eyes to a completely different theology that I had never been exposed to before college.

So it shouldn't be too surprising that my inspiration for my senior sermon didn't come from a biblical text, but from a song. It's entitled "Tidal Wave," a song performed by the band Owl City. I'll repeat the lyrics:

## Miranda Anderson

October 2, 2009

---

*I forgot the last time I felt brave, I just recall insecurity  
'Cause it came down like a tidal wave and sorrow swept over me  
Then I was given grace and love, I was blind but now I see  
'Cause I've found a new hope from above and courage swept over me.*

The lyrics, even after an initial listening, struck me. It's hard to put to words what it was that drew me to this stanza, but it continued to stick with me long after the final notes of the song faded. While I was desperately trying to figure out what I was going to do for this sermon, those lyrics persistently came back to mind and wouldn't leave. So I decided not to let them and they became my inspiration, leading me to the texts that I chose for today.

Ironically, both texts from Psalms and Romans are lectionary texts for the same Sunday taken from year A. What were the chances of finding a text that matched up to the lyrics of my new favorite song and for it to be paired with a Psalm that speaks of singing praises to our God? It was almost too good to be true.

For those of you who know me, and especially those of you who heard me preach the first Sunday of this year know that I have a passion for ideas that are in tension and cannot and should not be resolved. Ideas like hope and suffering, sinner and saint, all about you not about you and so on and so forth. I thrive on working with these tensions, something that I did not enjoy until I came to Augustana.

The Romans text is a classic Lutheran text. The chapter begins with the declaration that is central to Lutheran doctrine: "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God." Our justification comes through faith and faith alone, not some other means.

## Miranda Anderson

October 2, 2009

---

Paul continues by stating "...not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings..." While we have hope and peace and are justified, we still experience suffering. Christianity is not all happy-go-lucky, and things don't become easy. We still fail, we still fall, we still suffer. And yet there is still hope.

But Paul doesn't even stop there. He then talks about Christ's sacrifice for us: "For while we were still weak, at the *right time* Christ died for the ungodly...God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us." We are the ungodly. Jesus' love, God's love for us occurs when we were and are at our lowest. Before Jesus' death there was sin, during his death there was sin and after his death there was sin. But that doesn't change what his death meant and still means today. We receive grace even though we don't deserve it. Jesus died for us not for us to change, but so that we are freed to be human.

It is difficult to admit or accept that we are sinners and still receive grace. We can't resolve the two notions and must allow them to remain in tension. Accepting that we are sinners, we must also accept that we are forgiven. We must hold together what is opposite without compromising.

Music in many ways is relatable to this aspect of theology. Within any piece of music, there is a source of tension whether it be the entire piece or only a small section. As a participant, when you are listening to that part of the music you want to squirm. It's uncomfortable and not pleasing to the ear, and you want some kind of resolution. As humans, we are bound by sin, an uncomfortable and undesirable state of our lives. In both cases, this tension is unavoidable.

In music, what would the resolution be at the end of the piece without deviation and having a place to return? It would be stagnant and there would be no movement or excitement. In our faith lives, sin brings us away from God but it is through Jesus' death and ultimate

## Miranda Anderson

October 2, 2009

---

resurrection that brings us back to God. By this I don't mean to say that we are ever completely separated from God because God is always with us, always present. But it is our obsession with sin and our unwillingness to accept that we are forgiven, the thought that we need to do something to deserve it, that distracts us from God's unconditional grace.

In our lives, is there ever a true resolution? Since we are sinners, is there ever a time where we can be truly resolved? We have been forgiven, but we still sin. Within our faith lives there are many mini-tensions and mini-resolutions, all leading up to the big finale—our own resurrection and being reunited with God. The final resolution, the ultimate coming home.

The lyrics from “Tidal Wave” really spoke to me because they seem to be addressing this tension. We know that we do not deserve it, but grace and love is given to us. We have messed up, there seems to be no hope, but through Jesus' death, our eyes have been opened. There is tension there, but it is a natural tension that must be embraced. Jesus has given us permission to be human, giving us a new hope and courage to continue to live our lives, praising and worshiping our God.

Amen.