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**Senior Sermon**  
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“Reflections from Augie, Challenges for the Church”

Lately, I have been thinking a lot about my time at Augie. I guess that happens when one is about to graduate. I cannot believe that my time here is coming to an end. It seems like just yesterday I was being dropped off here for that first time. I don't know what to think about it all. One thing is for sure, although the time here has flown by so fast, the person who walked on campus that first day is different from the person who will walk off this campus in May. Augustana has been a great place for me to grow in academics as well as my relationships with God and others. Today, I would like to bring you through some of those things that I have learned while hopefully encouraging you on in your walks with our One true God.

As I have been here, God has really reminded me of His amazing love for me. The Bible declares this fact in John 3:16 and in Romans 5:8. John 3:16, a verse that is often quoted, declares, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

This is an amazing truth. God gave up His one and only Son for us. I don't know of many people who would give up their only son for a group of people that don't yet know Him. But that is what God did for us. He has such an amazing love that He was willing to do this for a lost world.

The second verse, Romans 5:8 declares, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” This is another quite amazing truth. The God of this universe looked at the individuals upon the earth as He died, and He looked forward to those who would be living later, and He had such love for them, that Christ died for us, while we were still sinners, while we were still rejecting Him. This is amazing, because it takes off all pressure to try to “be enough” to try to earn God's love. We don't have to live with a performance mentality because the God of this universe loves us.

Different times here at Augie, God has reminded me of His love, but the most recent thing occurred over J-term. I was in Brazil on a mission trip through Flite, one of the Christian organizations here on campus. The other Augie students and I were big brothers and sisters at a summer camp down there. While there we mentored the high schoolers and just shared our experiences with God. A cool thing about the trip was that I also received a great refreshing too. One of the nights we had a session in the sanctuary where the theme was just us and God. We had simple worship, the lights off, candles around the sanctuary, and a cross to the left of the stage. During the prayer time we were to have God search our hearts.

The first part of the time, God showed me areas of pride. At times I haven't been humble in ministering to others and I had allowed my agenda to happen instead of God's. Then the rest of the time I was wrestling with questions about God's love. “Does God really love me? He says He loves the world, but does He love me? When Christ was on the cross did He see me, or was it just the crowds of people?” On and on the questions came. These were questions that I knew in my head the answer was yes, but I was struggling to have it a reality in my heart.

The next day my “parents” at the camp prayed for me about these things. After the prayer we had a time of being quiet before God. At that point, God showed me some people that I needed to forgive. There were people that I had felt hurt by and had held onto those things. As I spoke out forgiveness of these people, I felt a wave of freedom. Then I asked my “parents” about these questions I was struggling with. What they told me, and what I would like to convey to you, was Psalm 139. This passage says that God has searched me and He knows me. He knows my sitting down and my rising up. He knows my thoughts from afar off. When I was in my mother’s womb, He saw me and He loved me. Also, they reminded me that the very hairs of my head are numbered. Nothing can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:31-39). It was so amazing to be reminded of these things. We serve a personal God who loves us each individually!

As we experience God’s love and as it changes us, is God content for us to simply go on living like nothing actually changed? Is He okay with us living engaging in sin? The last part of Romans 8 tells us that God does have everlasting love for us, and nothing can separate us from God’s love. We should look two chapters earlier, to Romans 6. This entire chapter describes us as being free from sin. As we have received the life through the Holy Spirit, sin’s grip upon us has been put to death. We are to live in that freedom through Christ, letting go of compromise that is too easy to hold onto—the sexual immorality, lying, stealing, and so on.

What does this love mean?

- We have a purpose. We weren’t put on this world just to live however we would like to live for 90 years if we are fortunate. Rather we were put on this world to experience God and His love while here, make His Name famous, and be prepared for an eternity of praising God.
- We were created to love God
- The One who created the universe and holds the stars in His hand and even calms the winds and the waves, also holds my heart. This same God will never leave us nor forsake us, has the Holy Spirit making intercession for us (Romans 8:26), wants us to be One with Him (John 17:20-23), and wants us to have eternal life with Him and to truly know Him as Christ has known Him (John 17:24-26).

Practical ways for life:

Daily ask God to bring you into freedom from sin.

Daily read the Bible—for an experience of God, for a reminder of His love, for guidance for right living, for direction away from sin.

Pray with others—as a way to stay accountable for right living, for victory in your life that you may live for God, for victory in other people’s lives, for God to touch your heart and other people’s hearts.

Find a strong Bible-believing, Christ-following church that will point you to God and His ways for you; one where you can encounter God. This will serve as a support and strength in living for God.

Live in a lifestyle of repentance, where we seek after God with everything we have and ask Him to search our hearts and draw us closer to Him.