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It seems to me that at the end of this whole Augie trip that it's been one big endurance contest.

Some of us have been here far too long. Those of us who are preparing to graduate are all basically on the verge of physical and mental collapse. We've seen things and done things that have changed who we are at a foundational level. We've seen things and done things that have helped us grow as people, and we've probably seen things and done things that would virtually *force* God to smite me if I were to mention them within the walls of this church. I mean after all we're college kids. We're trying. We're moving toward something, but what—well I guess that's a little bit hard to say. We're the type who's not all there yet, and you know what I mean:

There are those who would cast us college lot as “slow” to say the least.

And I guess that's understandable.

More than once have I seen 4.0 students take the batteries out of their smoke detectors in order to put them to better use in their Xbox controllers. Many of us—and you know who you are—have had that harrowing experience of returning parched from an early springtime jog only to horrifyingly stare at the two water bottles on the counter trying to remember which one has water in it and which one has the vodka from the party at Valhalla the previous night. There are those of us at whom the elders shake their heads at our perceived recklessness. We stay up too late and rise too early and cram for tests we should have been preparing for weeks ago while we were burning away our time on Facebook or at the bar. We are the dirty rotten scoundrels who realize that *now* is one of the few times we need only modest responsibility to survive: no

mortgage, no kids to take care of, our student loans haven't kicked in yet, just a few of classes and minimal attention to personal hygiene. Like beautiful little Peter Pans flying around campus instead of Neverland.

And while it might be easy to condemn us as misfits (and perhaps sometimes we are) we are moving. It's not something I'd choose to call "balance" really, but a sort of oscillation between imbalance and correction, like we're constantly recalibrating ourselves for some greater good. And I've seen this and I've lived this throughout my time here at Augustana College. I've been the guy passed out in the shower at your house, but I've also been the guy who's lived alongside the down and out in New York City slums genuinely trying to understand how I can help feed those who can't feed themselves. I've spent nights crashing private yacht parties in London in search of more wine and I've spent nights out in Guatemalan jungles in search of ways to improve an already fragile ecosystem. The point is that we're all like this. We're all trying the best way we can. We're not perfect, but at last check no one ever asked us to be. We are walking toward something better, and while our path might be a little skewed sometimes, give us young ones some faith because I promise we'll get there eventually.

But the biggest mistake we can make is thinking that we're going at it alone. So often, especially in youth, we try to tackle the world by ourselves, but without question the world is too big and too powerful a force to try to and subdue without help.

And really, it seems foolish to even try.

What do we gain from trying to live as isolated creatures whose sole purpose is to find a job, live blandly, and die with regrets? I think about today's scripture readings and feel pity for the men who walked alongside Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Here they were walking next to someone who was critically important to them and yet somehow failed to recognize him as a gift.

How often do we do this? How often do we take for granted the people who we surround ourselves with every day? You look past your significant other as you get home tired from work and don't see them as beautiful as they really are. You don't see your friends as the people who hold you up when your world crumbles beneath your feet. You don't call your parents as much as you should. How quickly do we get frustrated or lose our tempers or get selfish or thoughtless when people don't meet our expectations or serve us the way *we* feel should be served? How many times in the past week—the past *day*—have you taken for granted the people you say you love?

Don't get me wrong, the book of Luke is plenty inspirational, but I think just as helpful (or at least almost as helpful) is a chapter taken from the book of Ferris Bueller: "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it."

We're young!

We move fast.

I don't think it would do much good to tell us to slow down anyway. We are often too headstrong and feel as though time has yet to wrestle the breath out of us, but I think it is important that as we're moving by at such a blur that we at least take the time to see the people we're running with. As I look around this room I see people who I've come to hold so closely and think about the times I too have failed to appreciate them for all they are. Too often they've been stepping stones or simple party friends or people I call when I can't find anything else to do on a Friday night.

But there is some growing sense—and I think it's the right one—that we're all in this together. Maybe you don't have all the answers, and it's sure as shit I don't either, but when you

take the time to look around and embrace the people you're with, sometimes the answer you were looking for has been standing next to you all along.

It's easy to be selfish. It's easy to look back and look forward and put yourself and your goals in front of everything else. I'm no different. I know I've had the opportunity to do a lot of things in the past few years. I've rolled over the waves of the California coast and through the sketchiest casinos in Vegas. I've hit the streets of Rome and the ruins of Greece. I've laid small Belizean beaches on islands so far out from the glow of the mainland that each star in the night sky looks like God Himself blew white-hot embers over the gaping darkness. I've seen poor men and rich men and the young and the old and people with tears in their eyes from happiness and longing, but as I look back on it, it wasn't the places that brought me to where I'm standing now—it's always been the people.

And it when we are finally able to stop and appreciate these people that we learn something more about ourselves. We start to understand that we are all connected in a very real and honest way. It might be fun to run and ramble alone—some solitary trailblazer with a wild streak and a story to match—but if we truly felt we could have done it by ourselves, I doubt many of us would have made it out of college in one piece. The more I think about it, it's not so much the far corners of the world that interest us as it is the people who inhabit them.

Many of us will be leaving soon. We'll start running down new roads someplace, not necessarily toward Emmaus but *someplace* besides here. We'll meet new people and try new things. I might not know which direction I'm traveling, but that's not the point. I'll make my mistakes and take my licks. I promise there are at least a few nights left in me where I wake up hung over and hurting. People might say that we college punks are irresponsible, and maybe they're right, but we're getting there, because for all of our blunders we are getting better at

rising to the occasion. We are getting better at seeing that what matters most at the end of the day is that as long as you're aiming in the right general direction, you can trust there will always be good people—these gifts that are beside us every step of our lives—to help us along the way.

So we will look on all sides and see that we are surrounded by those who care. We will endure. Because by now, after all the hardships and trials, after all the long nights and harsh realizations we've found in this place, we've seen that we are surrounded by people who help us to keep moving.