

When I was the little and learning how to count I remember doing a lot of connect the dot worksheets. After drawing lines connecting all 26 letters or numbers 1-30, I would have a picture of either a dinosaur or a teddy bear staring up at me. I have out grown that game. However, in some ways the lives we live resemble a huge, complex and abstract game of connect the dots.

*"Make known to me your ways Lord; teach me your path"*

In life, I believe that every person we meet, job we hold, or experience we have happens for a reason and influences us in some way. Throughout the past three years at Augustana I have met a lot of people and had many experiences. However, I still do not know the significance of meeting every person I did or of every class I took. These answers may be clear months or years from now or I may never know for sure. Life is not an easy connect the dots where every experience and person we meet fits in chronological order on the road we call life. God reveals the path he wants us to take and teaches us how to do that using the experiences we have and the people we meet. Although always there guiding, He is also letting us go to find the path for ourselves. It is up to us to recognize what the next step in God's plan for us is. Sometimes this means having extra patience, or taking detours that involve trying many things before we find a suitable "fit".

*"In you I trust; do not let me be disgraced."*

Life is full of detours and potholes. It is hard to know where God is leading us which is why trusting God is important. For me, trusting God is like learning to swim. When I was younger and in swimming lessons my instructor told me to trust her and jump into the water because she would catch me. I thought she was nuts but eventually, I jumped in and besides getting wet, I was okay. Trusting God involves taking that leap of faith and trusting that we will bob back up to the surface. Sometimes, when we feel weighed down with work, choices, and family and friends issues we may feel like we will never be able to get our head above water again. God is still there, looking out for us, and ready to pull us back up. Unpleasant events do happen in our lives and even full trust in God will not prevent that. However, even the bad things can lead to the positive or even a lesson that may guide us in the direction to take our lives next. With our trust in God, our heads somehow stay above water even when we feel like a 50lb. weight made up of the daily stressors in life, is tied to our waist.

After taking that first jump into the pool, I continued to trust my instructor and eventually learned how to swim. To allow God to "make His ways known to us" we have to trust and be willing recognize and follow the

"dots" that take place in our lives. Experiences that we have guide us along the path of life, but it is the people we meet and interact with who make the majority of the dots in our lives and us in theirs. People are constantly making an impact on each other. It may be evident like a teacher helping a student or not so obvious such as a smile from a stranger. God uses other people to teach us and vice versa. Some of these are good lessons and some are the lessons we would rather forget. As we live life we interact with many people, all of us intersecting our paths in more ways than we recognize at first.

As I was writing this sermon a memory from chemistry 120 in the fall of my freshman year crossed my mind. I remember walking into the 1<sup>st</sup> chemistry class of the fall semester and praying that I would recognize or know someone, anyone. Well, I didn't, so I sat down next to a girl who looked like she was in the same vote I was. We started talking, became study buddies, and together, along with other students who we got to know throughout the semester, we made it through chemistry intact.

God uses each of us to teach and guide each other. It is amazing how influencing another person can be and how much we can influence and support another person. Through everyday interactions, people are helping themselves and others to find the paths God is guiding them to. I believe God is constantly there but sometimes, that holy presence is in the form of someone else.

So what about this complicated game of real life connect the dots? Maybe it is not a line connecting each dot but instead the accumulation of the trillions of dots made by the experiences we have had and people we have interacted with overlapping and being placed so that they form an even more detailed picture. Such a picture that we cannot imagine until someday we step back and just say "wow".