

Grace to you and peace this day from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Let's take a minute and breathe. Seriously—everyone do it. It's Monday. The end is drawing near. No—I am not talking about the Rapture or anything like that. I'm talking about something much more pressing. Finals week, summer vacation, and for some of us unlucky ones—graduation. So let's take a few seconds and breathe.

I love that. That feeling you get when you relax, shake out your shoulders, breathe, and realize that you are alive. I forget, sometimes. To be honest, I think we all have moments when we forget that we are living creatures. College has a tendency to make students feel like robots after all. Wake up, shower, class, chapel (most days), class, work, class, homework, orchestra, nap, supper, homework, snack, bed, repeat. We forget that we are alive. We forget that we are creatures who can create, creatures who can enjoy creation, creatures who were created in order to live and *grow* together in Christ. To grow as branches, as Jesus says.

Instead of thinking of a vine and branches, I like to think about the relationship between Christ and humanity as a grove of aspen trees. I love aspens. Maybe it's the Coloradan in me, but Aspens have a special beauty that instantly grabs my attention. I love their leaves in the fall, the sounds they make when they quake from the wind, and the residue from their bark that can be used as natural sunscreen (seriously, try it!) However, the thing I love most about aspen trees can be found underground. Aspens, believe it or not, grow in communities and share one gigantic root system. Groves that span for miles and are widespread are all, in fact, more intimately connected than a leaf to a branch. They share roots, and while trees eventually die, root systems can continue to grow and produce new trees for thousands of years. When fires come and burn forests to the ground, root systems remain—and after the ground has cooled, they produce new forests and trees that grow taller than ever.

We are rooted in Christ. He allows us to grow, He connects us in community, and He sustains and nourishes us with His own body and blood. So take a breath. Inhale and exhale, and start to feel your roots. Do not let the busy things and the routines make you forget that you are living creatures who were created in order to live together through Christ and created in order to help our neighbors grow.

We, as the Augustana community, have a responsibility of growth. We are here in order to become leaders in the world, leaders who will help those around us grow. We are future doctors, lawyers, teachers, professors, and pastors who are called to show our neighbors that all is possible through Christ. We are called to proclaim growth. The prophet Isaiah states “Behold I am doing a new thing, now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I make a way in the wilderness and streams in the desert!” We, as members of the body of Christ are called to proclaim newness. We are called to proclaim that we are all alive in Christ. We, as leaders in this community, are made in order to create new ideas, explore all corners of this earth, fight injustice, and work together.

Today, we celebrate the installation of next year's ASA president and vice president. Thad, Matt, you both have been called to serve this campus. To show students, faculty, and the surrounding community what life together in Christ should look like. Breathe. And remember that you're rooted in Christ. Breathe, and remember that you are here to help your neighbors. Breathe, and remember that your neighbors are here to help you with love and kindness. Breathe.