

Good Morning. My name is Matt Cook and as you've heard I'm currently a theatre major with a religion minor and still in perpetual denial that I am indeed a senior. I'd like to thank you all for coming and to Marilyn, Alaina, and Kayla for their help this morning.

As I think back on my time here at Augie. Wait, you know how weird that sounds. "As I think back on my time here at Augie..." as if I've actually spent all that much time here. After all wasn't it only a few short years ago that I moved in to Solberg. Wasn't it only yesterday that I started classes in Religion, Chemistry, Calculus, Theatre and many other fascinating and frustrating academic areas? Wasn't it only a few hours ago that I first encountered Bonheoffer? And no Ann, I still can't escape him. It's like he's always there, ready to jump out at any moment and shout SURPRISE! Well it wasn't exactly yesterday or a few hours ago. In fact it's been 1,136 days and counting since I started classes here at Augie. Yikes. That's a lot of days, and in that time I have been running around exploring new ideas and new possibilities, sometimes with or without my head attached.

One of the ideas that I have been playing with recently especially in the context of being a senior is that of vocation. Where is my place? What am I called to do? Where am I going? To me vocation is like a chess game. Each piece has a role to play. Each piece has places on the board that it can and cannot go. Not every piece can be the King for then the game doesn't work. So too is it with life. We all have places and roles to fill. Not everyone can be the King.

In order to answer these questions, I've been looking at themes found within exploration. Psalm 23 speaks of exploring, of being led to unknown and strange places, and I have had so many chances to explore while here at Augie. Some of those explorations have felt like green

pastures, while others seemingly more like the valley of death. “Explore. Discover. Create.”

Isn't that our Mantra?

Exploration for some sleep-deprived reason or another makes me think of the labyrinth and the Minotaur. When the unfortunate youths first went into the labyrinth, they had no way to get back. They had no anchor, no base to which they could return. In the process, they despaired and were destroyed. Contrast that to Theseus, the young hero who decided to take a thread along with him. As long as he kept the thread close to his heart, he would be able to find his way home.

I find that the world is like the labyrinth. There are so many possibilities, so many directions and turns to take. It can be so easy to get lost. We lose our way and can't find home again. Just in case you haven't noticed, it is homecoming time here at Augie. Now is a time when people return to their Augustana Home. While they lead different lives, they all have one thing in common. They all have threads coming back to Augie. Threads which link and intertwine worldwide

I believe that God serves as perhaps the greatest and strongest thread of the mix. Together with many other strings and threads of varying lengths and thicknesses we are connected to God and to each other. God serves as the central base from which all other threads are connected and interwoven. It begins to form a web just like a spider does. Now I don't know a ton about spiders other than they have eight legs and that my supervisor at the library is deathly afraid of them. But I do know that a spider without its web cannot survive. The same applies to us. Without our web, our threads, our homes, our anchors, our connections we too cannot survive.

In thinking about the ideas of vocation and exploration, I want to reflect on the following things:

1. I ask that each of us enjoy our time at home, whatever that home may be, and realize just how fast that time goes by.
2. I encourage everyone to explore something new and exciting. Who knows where it may lead. I believe that each of us is called to some something greater, and it is only through exploration that we can we find what that calling, that vocation is.
3. Don't be afraid to fail. If we never make mistakes, how can we find our true calling, our true home? Process of elimination can work wonders.
4. Don't be afraid to look and to be goofy. You only find yourself when you are yourself. As I learned from a recent late-night game of Madlibs, remember to be sparkly, be quirky, be strange, and laugh till you can laugh no more.

And Lastly

5. No matter how far you go, how far you explore, your thread will always bring you home to that calling. To that place where you belong.