

Senior Sermon 10-21-2011  
God's timing and our passions

Have you ever had a “why me” experience? Wondered where God was in that event and what was God’s plan? This year God led me through some major life experiences. One life-changing experience I had was when the Augustana band took its trip abroad to Egypt. Making a very long story short, we were there in time to witness the beginnings of Egypt’s quest for democracy and freedom from its then ruler, former President Mubarak. Granted, it took us all a little by surprise since the itinerary committee failed to include that event in the syllabus. The band was divided into three separate groups and my group was supposed to be the first ones to leave the country. Due to flight cancellations from an American airline, we ended up being the last ones to leave. Looking back, I’m very glad we were. One of the first things we were told on our tour bus by our Egyptian tour guides was do not drink the tap water or else you will suffer from the much feared “mummy tummy”. We were diligent in purchasing water bottles when needed so as to avoid this dilemma. However, once the revolution began to start my band group was still stuck in Egypt. If ever there was an opportunity for an “Oh why me” moment, I’m pretty sure this would count as one. First, the Delta flight that was supposed to take my group home decided to cancel its flight to Cairo. Each morning my group was faced with more news of having difficulty securing space on flights to Amsterdam. It was difficult watching the other two groups packing up and heading towards the airport and on their way home. We weren’t sure how long we would have to stay and we still needed to buy water from a local gas station that was within walking distance from our hotel. We wandered over looking very much like the American tourists we were to buy food and water. A local Egyptian stopped one of my fellow students and gave him 50 Egyptian pounds, telling him that he wanted to help us purchase food and water and that he didn’t need it. Being the polite mid-westerners we were, my classmate tried to politely refuse the money, but the man

insisted, pulling out another 50 pounds, making the total equivalent of about \$20. This man had no idea who we were but understood that we were caught in the middle of a situation that we had no control over and in a foreign country. He told us that this revolution was not about Americans and that it was not our fault. He felt bad that we were stuck here and wished us a speedy trip home. On our way out of the store, armed with water and other Egyptian treats another man stopped us asking if we wanted his sunglasses. Looking back, because I was part of the last group to come home, I was able to see God working through these people and being a part of God's timing and planning. The Holy Spirit interceded through our Egyptian neighbors to show Christ's love. God used those people to show care and concern for their neighbor, regardless if they knew us or not or whether we were part of the same country even. They were living out the Gospel text of loving one another. The other life-altering event I experienced was nearly a month ago, when my lung partially collapsed for a second time. There really is no "good time" for a lung to partially collapse. It was evening, I had gone to bed already and wasn't sure what to do. I went over to my friend's room to see if she was still up and ask her what she thought I should do. Her reply, "If I was in your shoes, what would you tell me to do?" "I would tell you to go to the hospital immediately." "Then do it." I called my parents who were on their way back from Washington, D.C. They had had a flight delay in Chicago so I had no idea if they were still in flight or still in Chicago and by then it was midnight. They picked up the phone and told me they had just landed in Sioux Falls and could come and get me. God's perfect timing was again in full swing. Even my frail human self couldn't have planned that any better.

Looking back on both situations, it would be easy to have an "Oh why me?" attitude. But looking at the broader scope of things and not looking inward on our own pity party, it's easy to see how our neighbors, be they family, friends or Egyptians, help embody the timing of God and

how God can use everyone for His glory. We just have to let Him. We are much more inclined to worry about ourselves and if we are doing all we can do. It isn't about us though. It is about our neighbor. Seeing the love that the Egyptian men displayed by giving of their money and resources freely to help people who held different religious beliefs than they did made the Gospel text come alive in the here and now. They were freely serving their neighbor. Through God's perfect timing, my family was able to go with me to the hospital that night.

We certainly will never know what God is up to in heaven, but we do know what he was up to here on Earth. His Son, Jesus Christ shows us how we are to live out our lives in serving our neighbor through His examples. He did not set out to show how great He was or see if He could become "king of the hill" but lowered Himself down to the form of a servant. Our talents and abilities, while they may be nurtured by our family and friends, ultimately come from God and are His. God calls us to use our talents and abilities, not to "get ahead" in life, especially by stepping on our neighbor to get to the top, but rather to serve our neighbor in every way we can.

This would beg the question who is my neighbor? My neighbor is everyone. Each of us is here to serve one another. God can place you in a certain time and place to be his servant. We shouldn't serve with the expectation of recognition or thanks but simply knowing that we helped our neighbor. We were each given a job or vocation here on Earth. We should strive to do our job to the best of our ability. Whether or not we are "doing it right" is not up for us to decide not even our neighbor. All we can do is what God commanded us to do and love and serve our neighbor.

If our identify of who we are lies within ourselves, than we focus internally on selfish things and only looking at bettering ourselves and certainly not looking out for our neighbor and his well being. But if our identity of who we are lies in Christ, we are no longer focused on ourselves but helping our neighbor in any way we are capable regardless if we are doing it right or wrong. Our

only concern should be that we are extending a hand to those in need. Like the Egyptians showing kindness towards foreigners and strangers and my parents, though tired from traveling still stayed with me in the hospital, I hope that I can remind myself daily of my identity in Christ and extend that same kindness and love towards my neighbor and show Christ's love. I remind myself that I should place my faith and trust in the One who knows the master plan for my life, knowing that I do not know what each day holds but thank God for every day that I have been given. The best laid plans of mice and men often go astray. God's plans never go astray.