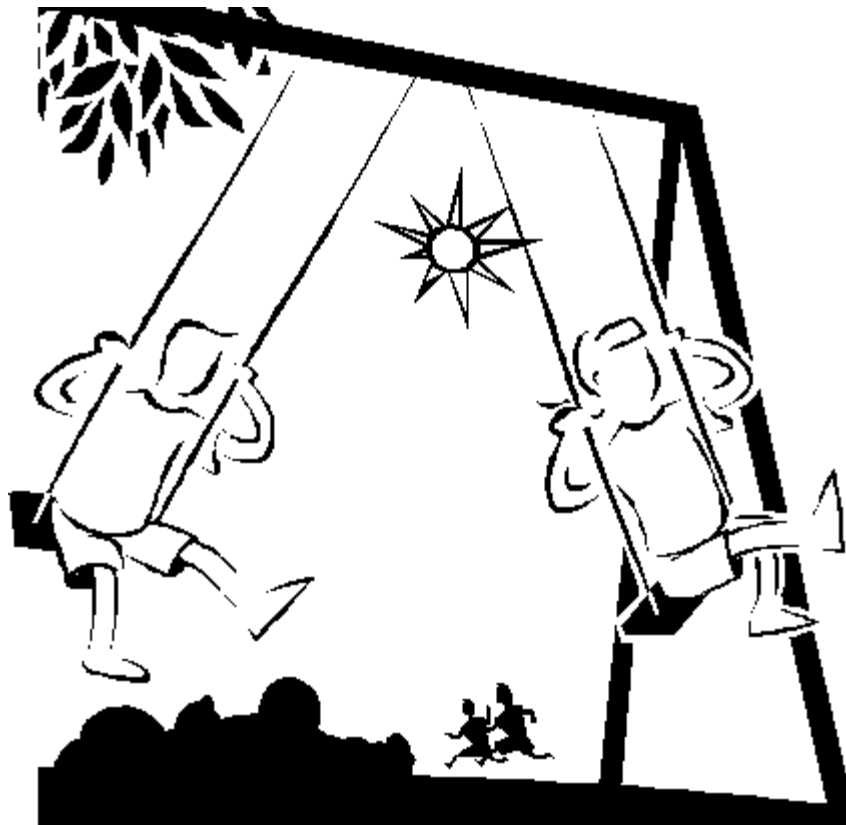


AColyte

March 2011

*A Journal of Faith, Doubt, and Other Things
at Austin College*



dependents

AColyte

A Journal of Faith, Doubt, and Other Things at Austin College

Rev. John Williams, Ph.D., Editor

900 N. Grand Ave.

Suite 61647

Sherman, TX 75090

903.813.2220

jwilliams@austincollege.edu

On Campus This Spring

In addition to weekly Bible Study (5:30 Tuesdays in the Moseley Room) and Sunday Night Worship (6pm in the Small Chapel with dinner following), the following religious and cultural events are scheduled for the last few weeks of the semester:

MASALA

Sunday April 10—7pm in Sid Richardson Gym

GREEN SERVE

Sunday April 17, 1-3pm

EARTH DAY WORSHIP SERVICE

Sunday April 17—6pm in the Small Chapel

MODEL SEDER DINNER

Tuesday April 19—5pm in Mabee Hall

BACCALAUREATE SERVICE

Saturday May 14, 7pm in Sid Richardson Gym

Rev. Bruce Reyes-Chow, Former Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA), preaching.



TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN...

Springtime
Tax Season
Old Settlers Park

*You get a shiver in the dark
It's raining in the park but meantime
South of the River you stop and hold everything
The band is blowing Dixie, double four time
You feel alright when you hear the music swing.
--Dire Straits, "Sultans of Swing"*

Lately I've been thinking a lot about dependence.

It started a couple weeks ago. Linnea, Emily, Joseph and I went down to Ft. Worth and spent the day with my parents. We went to a movie. My kids wanted to take my Dad to see *Gnomeo and Juliet*; it's a long and complicated story – not the movie, the reason my kids associate gnomes with my father.

Anyway, we went to Ft. Worth, saw the movie, and tested out the new swing in Papa and Grandma's back yard (Joseph has outgrown the old one). We had a lot of fun.

As we drove back to Sherman that night, everybody in the car except me fell asleep. I love when they do that. I'm kind of a sentimental guy and I think a lot about the trust in me that's implied every time my kids – and my wife – go to sleep while I'm driving.

It's tax season, so the notion of "dependents" was on my mind a little bit. According to the IRS, all of us have *been* dependents; and lots of us *have* dependents now. As I drove my sleeping family, I thought about how their willingness to sleep as I drove them was evidence of real dependence and trust.

After we got home, I looked up the word “dependent” in the dictionary. I learned that its root is the Latin word “pendere” – a verb that means *to hang* or *to hang upon*. “Pendere” is also the root of words like “pendulum” and “suspend.”

“Depend” is a combination of “pendere” and the Latin preposition “de”, which means *down from* or *away from*.

So to “depend” literally means to hang down off of something. When the IRS asks you how many “dependents” you have, they’re really asking you how many people you have hanging off of you. I’ve got two kids at home – that seems like a perfectly legitimate image to me.

We’ve got to get down to Swingtown.

--Steve Miller

One day recently, Linnea and Emily went shopping in Dallas. So Joseph and I spent the day together.

We ended up at Old Settlers Park.

I knew I wanted to write an *AColyte* this Spring so I took some books and sat down on a bench on the playground to begin to think about what I might want to write.

Earlier that week, we had studied Matthew 6:24-34 at the AC Bible Study. It’s the Bob Marley/Bobby McFerrin (*Don’t worry about a thing/Don’t worry, be happy*) section of the Sermon on the Mount.

24 “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other.

You cannot serve God and wealth.

25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

26 Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

27 And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?

28 And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin,
29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.
30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?
31 Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?"
32 For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.
33 But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.
34 "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

*We live on front porches and swing life away
We get by just fine here on minimum wage
If love is a labor, I'll slave to the ends
I won't cross these streets until you hold my hand.
--Rise Against*

As I said, I've been thinking a lot about dependence this Spring, and I had this vague idea that there was something about dependence in Matthew 6:24-34. But I couldn't quite grasp it.

Jesus jumps around a little in that passage. He talks about

- Not serving two masters
- Not worrying about food or drink or clothes,
- Birds
- Flowers
- Gentiles and
- The Kingdom of God.

I sat there at the park for about an hour, scratching my head and trying to find some way to tie all that together.

At our Bible Study in the Moseley Room, we looked up the Matthew passage in the contemporary translation of the Bible called *The Message*. Retired Presbyterian minister Eugene Peterson produced the *Message* as a way to recover some of the earthy, informal language of the original texts of the Bible; an earthiness that he believes has been polished and homogenized away by some of the common English translations.

The *Message* has an interesting translation of Jesus' words in Matthew 6:26. In the version printed above, Jesus says,

*Look at the birds of the air;
they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns,
and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.
Are you not of more value than they?*

The *Message* translation renders verse 26 like this:

*Look at the birds, free and unfettered,
not tied down to a job description,
careless in the care of God.
And you count far more to him than birds.*

I sang along while I was swinging.
--Kimya Dawson

At the Bible Study, a couple students really liked that phrase – *careless in the care of God*. As I read it at the park, I realized that, while I had spent about an hour thinking about this stuff, my son Joseph had spent the whole time on a swing – swinging as high as he could and singing *Viva la Vida*, *Don't Stop Believing*, and all sorts of other songs at the top of his lungs. He was clearly “careless in the care of God.”

I remembered what “dependent” means. “To hang down from.”

A boisterous, loud, and joyful little boy on a swing is as good a metaphor for dependence as you're ever going to see.

When we were little, my brother and I used to go to the park down the street from our house, get in the swings, and then loudly sing Rock & Roll songs.

When I told my Dad about Joseph singing and swinging, he said that he used to do the same thing in his backyard when he was growing up.

Swinging and singing loud is a long and storied tradition among the Williams men.

And it's not limited to us.

The fact that so many people mention (and envy) the excellent porch swing at my house tell me that lots of us love – or at least used to love – to swing.

Life is just a tire swing.
--Jimmy Buffett

There's a lot of theology in swings:

- You can do more in a swing than you can do in a chair or on a bench. (If you're looking for an eternally true and unimpeachable statement from me – that's it: you can do more in a swing than you can in a chair or on a bench)
- You can't have a swing without a strong and solid frame.
- But with that solid frame you can do things that you could never do without it.
- Depending on the frame doesn't restrict you, it liberates you.

I think Jesus' message in Matthew 6:24-34 might be something like:

*Don't worry because you can't fly,
The frame from which you hang is strong.
Swing and swing high!*

These words invite us to consider the extent to which we are liberated and empowered by our dependence

- on each other
- on institutions like Austin College (*and maybe the government?*)
- on God
- and on education.

I think this is relevant for a little church-related college out here on the Texas prairie.

It offers a fresh vocabulary for the ongoing conversations between Austin College students and everybody who keeps trying gently to ask you about

THE REST OF YOUR LIFE.

It's no news to anybody reading this that we talk a lot around here about "careers," "outcomes," "vocational discernment," and all that (undoubtedly important) stuff.

But I wonder whether there might be value in changing our question a little bit.

Instead of asking,

What do I want to do?

or even

What am I called to do?

would it make any difference if instead you asked

Under what circumstances am I prepared to be depended on?

or, more literally,

Who am I willing to let hang or swing off of me?

To borrow language from the IRS, a case could be made that Austin College is here to assist and accompany students as they progress from *being* dependents to *having* dependents. We're here to help you become good frames for the swings of others.

That may seem a long way off to you – but have you ever driven a car while someone you love slept? I'm just saying...

It's good to be dependent. We all are, whether we like it or not.

Your dependence enables you to do things you could never do by yourself.

Embrace it.

Swing High.

Don't just sit there.

Get busy.

Grab onto the chains.

Do the work.

Sing Loud.

To quote the old movie *Slapshot*, "Let 'em know you're there."

Contribute.

Add your voice to the choir.

Make others notice – and be glad – that you're part of the story.

Push each other when you can, because sometimes we all need a little help to get started.

And be dependable. Keep an eye out for situations where you might be the branch, the frame, or the chain for someone else's swing.

It's Spring. Go swing (or at least watch a kid do it).

Until next time, I remain,

Just Another Cowboy Preacher,

Quoting Duke Ellington (*It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing*),

JOHN WILLIAMS

Chaplain.



ACTIVATORS 500TH EVENT CELEBRATION
DINNER
January 29, 2011

Last January, the Grace Presbytery Senior High Youth Connection was the 500th ACTivators event. We marked that event with a dinner in Mabee Hall. As part of the festivities, the students who were the original five ACTivators came back to campus to help us celebrate.

Here's what they said:

Before the Activators came to be, a few of us knew about Grace Presbytery's Senior High Youth Conference and we wanted to help out. We called the people in charge of the conference and, well, they didn't know what to do with us. They politely offered to involve us in moving some tables around and making some posters. Though we appreciated their offer, we wanted to be more involved. You see, we knew that youth conferences changed lives and, as good Austin College students, we wanted to help change lives.

It is fitting that the 500th Activator event celebrates the faithful partnership between SHYC and Austin College. In the past twenty years, we've gone from youth events that didn't know what to do with college students to becoming the best mobile youth ministry program in the Presbyterian Church. Over the years, lives have been changed in significant ways.

John and Linnea's lives were changed when they were called to Austin College. Not long after their arrival, John changed the face of ministry at Austin College

by creating the Activator program. What began with a fun weekend in Santa Fe Presbytery that included the Blue Mesa, overcooked crosses, and a massage therapist named Thunder, has turned into something bigger than any of us could imagine.

Through the miracles of Facebook, it's been a blast over the past couple of weeks for the five of us to reconnect and try to figure out what we could possibly say tonight that wouldn't bore the heck out of all of you. Like many of you, we rediscovered our bond that, even after years of not being together, our relationships pick up just like no time has passed at all. The one thing that stuck out to us is that Austin College and the Activator program changed all of our lives. Being an Activator gave us a chance to use our gifts and test our callings. That's what the Activator program is all about—calling forth gifts in Austin College students. All five of us are still active different types of educational ministries. We know that you, too, are here tonight because your life was changed as a result of being an Activator.

Over the years, the Activators have changed the lives of thousands of people who have participated in children and youth events across the denomination. Many of you came to Austin College after experiencing an Activator event and then wanting to be an Activator.

Even the Activator t-shirts have changed lives. There are lots stories of people who have been stopped to talk about things like:

- The fact that God gave us brains & expects us to use them
- Pass on the love, the change begins with me
- Why would you possibly want to do Star Trekkin' for food!
- And if you don't know why Christianity is too important to be left to adults, then we will pray for you.

While the five of us are honored to be recognized tonight, we know that the Activators program is much bigger than any of us. It is about every person gathered here tonight who has been affected throughout the 500 Activator events. It's amazing for the five of us to see all of you and to know how much the Activators have grown since it first started!

So thank you to John for making this ministry real. Thank you to Linnea for her love, undying support, and home cooked meals! Thank you to Emily and Joseph for sharing your parents with us. And, thank you to Austin College for recognizing how important this ministry is, not only to the college, but for people's lives.

In closing, we have two important points that come directly from John's influence on our lives:

- First, as Reformed theologians, all of the lives that have been changed through the Activators program are not the result of any one of us. Rather, the changes come from God and we must always remember this. The Holy Spirit has been working through all of us and will continue to work through the next 500 events.
- Second, it's always good to be a little bit rebellious. We've heard that John wanted tonight not to be about him, but to really focus on the students. But we're going to rebel a bit and say a special thank you to the entire William's family for all of the years of love and support.

Although this charge was written after we graduated it is always appropriate:

As beloved, gifted, capable, and safe children of God,

Go out into the world in peace.

Have courage.

Hold on tight to all that is good.

Return no one evil for evil.

Support the weak.

Strengthen the fainthearted.

Honor all people.

Love and serve the Lord.

Share what you have.

Speak truth tenderly and lovingly.

Clean up your own messes.

Use the brains God gave you.

Act like gifted and beloved people.

Because that IS what you *are*.

And go with the full confidence
That the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ;
The love of God;
And the communion of the Holy Spirit
ARE with us all;
Today;
Tomorrow;
And forever.
Amen.



Red T-Shirt:

Janet Chester, '95

Director of Christian Education
Covenant Presbyterian Church, Sherman, TX

Teal Shirt:

Amy Allen Parker, '95

Director of Children's Ministry
First Presbyterian Church, Ft. Worth, TX

We don't know the guy in the blue cap.



Noelle Castin, '95

Director of Christian Education
Bradley Street Presbyterian Church, Bethesda, MD



Michael Harper, BA '94, MAT '97

Associate General Editor
Congregational Ministries Publishing
Presbyterian Church (USA)



Brandon Wert, '96

PCUSA Young Adult Volunteers Site Coordinator
Tucson, AZ