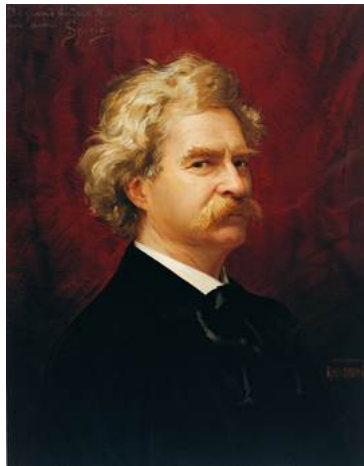


AColyte

Opening of School 2017
A Journal of Faith, Doubt, and Other Things
at Austin College



Welcome to College in 2017
(it's not all about white men, but sometimes...)

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AColyte

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

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WHAT IS THE *AColyte* AND WHY DO I HAVE ONE?

Welcome to the first edition of the *AColyte* for the 2017-18 school year.

This journal is intended to provide a forum for the Austin College community to discuss theological issues and keep up with what's going on in our various Religious Life programs.

We operate with a fairly broad definition of theology around here. As far as we're concerned, anybody who spends time thinking about which things matter more than other things is a theologian.

That probably even includes you.

The use of the term “AColyte” for our title is based on our hope that, like an acolyte who lights candles in a worship service, we can also be “bringers of light,” or “bringers of flame,” or instruments to help “lighten things up.” If nothing else, we can promise to provide ample opportunities to practice the virtues of patience and forgiveness.

Feel free to reply if you have questions or comments or corrections.

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN...

In the Shadow of the Moon,
At the Edge of the Herd,
And Right Where We Should Be
August 2017

"All right, then, I'll go to hell"
-Mark Twain,
Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884),
Chapter 31

I said to myself that my eclipse would be sure to save me...
Mark Twain,
A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (1889),
Chapter 6

I've been thinking a lot about Mark Twain lately.

After 17 inches of rain in August, I've been thinking about Noah, too.

But mostly it's been Mark Twain.

I don't usually think about him much.

Like many of us, I read some of his stuff in Junior High and High School (Huckleberry Finn, Tom Sawyer and some of his short stories).

When I was little, my Dad regularly read "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County"

to my brother, Mom, and me. He could never get through it without cracking up laughing.

I can't either.

And I read Innocents Abroad when I was an Austin College student way back in the last millennium.

But I haven't thought about Mark Twain much in recent years.

Until the Charlottesville riots.

As I watched Nazis, KKK members, and other white supremacists yelling their obnoxious, hateful slogans and rationalizing ugly, reprehensible, and fundamentally un-American behavior in the name of some twisted sort of patriotism, I suddenly found myself thinking of a scene from Chapter 31 of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

(I remembered the scene. I had to look up the chapter. I'm not that big of a geek.)

It's kind of complicated.

And you're literate and can read it yourselves if you want to.

But I keep thinking about it as I think about Charlottesville and all the conversations in our culture about how different people have responded to and interpreted the "Unite the Right" rally and subsequent riots and fights that took place there on August 12.

For most of Huckleberry Finn, Huck is in the company of Jim, and African-American man who is an escaped slave.

By the time we get to Chapter 31, some bad hombres that Huck and Jim had met in their travels have captured Jim and returned him to captivity.

As Huck is trying to get his head around this development, all sorts of thoughts go through his head.

Once I said to myself it would be a thousand times better for Jim to be a slave at home where his family was, as long as he's got to be a slave, and so I'd better write a letter to Tom Sawyer and tell him to tell Miss Watson where he was. But I soon give up that notion, for two things: she'd be mad and disgusted at his rascality and ungratefulness for leaving her, and so she'd sell him straight down the river again; and if she didn't, everybody naturally despises an ungrateful [*slave—although that's not the word in the text*], and they'd make Jim feel it all the time, and so he'd feel ornery and disgraced.

The "n" word is used repeatedly in the text of Huckleberry Finn. But I don't need to print it here.

And then think of me! It would get all around, that Huck Finn helped a [slave] to get his freedom; and if I was to ever see anybody from that town again, I'd be ready to get down and lick his boots for shame.

As readers, we are meant to assume that, like every other white child in the pre-Civil War South, Huck had been told that it was his duty to respect the institutions of the society where he lived, and that clearly included returning runaway slaves.

That was my fix exactly. The more I studied about this, the more my conscience went to grinding me, and the more wicked and low-down and ornery I got to feeling.

Again, Huck had heard for his whole life that it was his sacred duty to respect the law and that clearly meant not aiding and abetting runaway slaves.

And at last, when it hit me all of a sudden that here was the plain hand of Providence slapping me in the face and letting me know my wickedness was being watched all the time from up there in heaven, whilst I was stealing a poor old woman's [slave] that hadn't ever done me no harm, and now was showing me there's One that's always on the lookout, and ain't agoing to allow no such miserable doings to go only just so fur and no further, I most dropped in my tracks I was so scared.

Huck is afraid, and fairly certain, that God will punish him for not returning Jim to his owner.

Well, I tried the best I could to kinder soften it up somehow for myself, by saying I was brung up wicked, and so I warn't so much to blame; but something inside of me kept saying, "There was the Sunday school, you could a gone to it; and if you'd a done it they'd a learnt you, there, that people that acts as I'd been acting about that [slave] goes to everlasting fire."

Huck is convinced that, if he had gone to Sunday School, he would have understood his duty to follow the rules of his society regarding slavery.

It made me shiver. And I about made up my mind to pray; and see if I couldn't try to quit being the kind of a boy I was, and be better. So I kneeled down. But the words wouldn't come. Why wouldn't they? It warn't no use to try and hide it from Him. Nor from me, neither. I knowed very well why they wouldn't come. It was because my heart warn't right; it was because I warn't square; it was because I was playing double. I was letting on to give up sin, but away inside of me I was holding on to the biggest one of all. I was trying to make my mouth say I would do the right thing and the clean thing, and go and write to that [slave's] owner and tell where he was; but deep down in me I knowed it was a lie-and He knowed it. You can't pray a lie- I found that out.

So I was full of trouble, full as I could be; and didn't know what to do. At last I had an idea; and I says, I'll go and write the letter- and then see if I can pray. Why, it was astonishing, the way I felt as light as a feather, right straight off, and my troubles all gone. So I got a piece of paper and a pencil, all glad and excited, and set down and wrote:

Miss Watson your runaway [slave] Jim is down here two mile below Pikesville and Mr. Phelps has got him and he will give him up for the reward if you send. HUCK FINN

I felt good and all washed clean of sin for the first time I had ever felt so in my life, and I knowed I could pray now. But I didn't do it straight off, but laid the paper down and set there thinking- thinking how good it was all this happened so, and how near I come to being lost and going to hell. And went on thinking. And got to thinking over our trip down the river; and I see Jim before me, all the time; in the day, and in the night-time, sometimes moonlight, sometimes storms, and we a floating along, talking, and singing, and laughing. But somehow I couldn't seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind. I'd see him standing my watch on top of his'n, stead of calling me, so I could go on sleeping; and see him how glad he was when I come back out of the fog; and when I come to him agin in the swamp, up there where the feud was; and such-like times; and would always call me honey, and pet me, and do everything he could think of for me, and how good he always was; and at last I

struck the time I saved him by telling the men we had smallpox aboard, and he was so grateful, and said I was the best friend old Jim ever had in the world, and the only one he's got now; and then I happened to look around, and see that paper.

It was a close place. I took it up, and held it in my hand. I was a trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself:

"All right, then, I'll go to hell"- and tore it up.

"All right, then, I'll go to hell."

That's a white character, created by a white author, explicitly rejecting white supremacy.

Really.

"If that's what 'God' wants, I don't want anything to do with that 'God.'"

There are all sorts of important and relevant commentaries and scholarly essays about Huckleberry Finn and the subtle, racist caricatures and ideas that are still present in Twain's book. And those are important and to be taken seriously.

But I thought of that line ("All right, then, I'll go to hell") when I watched those Nazis and KKK folks and white supremacists carrying crosses and screaming at people in Charlottesville.

By writing that chapter, and especially that line, Twain was explicitly rejecting the notion—long held by many Americans before, during, and after the Civil War and into the present day—that some people matter more than other people and that somehow that distinction is part of God's plan.

He was suggesting, in 1889, that that was a crappy idea.

It was.

It still is.

(EDITOR'S WARNING:

Here comes the kind of weird jump that Chaplains make all the time.)

In my Bible, Genesis 1:26-27 says:

*Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."
So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

We've got all year to unpack the "dominion" and "male and female" stuff.

It's complicated.

For now, let's just focus on what it might mean for *every human being* to be created in the image of God.

If nothing else, I think that suggests that *every human being* is equally and profoundly valuable.

That includes people who look like me, think like me, worship like me, vote like me, and love like me.

It also includes people who do not look like me, think like me, worship like me, vote like me, or love like me.

And if there's some god out there who will damn me unless I value some people more than others based on the particular racial, religious, ethnic, sexual, or political categories they fit into—

All right then, I'll go to hell.

Until next time, I remain,
Just Another Cowboy Preacher,
Stretching So I Can Push Back,

JOHN WILLIAMS
Chaplain

P.S.—I've also been thinking a lot this week about another Mark Twain quote:

But it is a blessed provision of nature that at times like these, as soon as a man's mercury has got down to a certain point there comes a revulsion, and he rallies. Hope springs up, and cheerfulness along with it, and then he is in good shape to do something for himself, if anything can be done. When my rally came, it came with a bound. I said to myself that my eclipse would be sure to save me, and make me the greatest man in the kingdom besides; and straightway my mercury went up to the top of the tube, and my solitudes all vanished. I was as happy a man as there was in the world. I was even impatient for tomorrow to come, I so wanted to gather in that great triumph and be the center of all the nation's wonder and reverence. Besides, in a business way it would be the making of me; I knew that.

“my eclipse”? More about that later.

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Austin College AActivators

The AActivators are a group of Austin College students who work with Chaplain John Williams to plan and lead regional Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) youth ministry events. AActivators work with host groups to choose scripture-based themes for youth events and then prepare keynote presentations, small group materials, music, and recreational activities for each event. AActivators also act as partners with other program organizations, filling leadership roles and working with other church groups who work with children, youth, adults, and senior citizens.



ACTIVATORS 2017-18 SCHEDULE

Tuesday August 29, 2017 - 4:30 p.m.--ACTIVATE!!
Energizers and Music in the Small Chapel

Wednesday September 6, 2017
ACTivators lead Worship at Homestead Senior Care Center in Denison

Friday-Sunday September 22-24, 2017
Preston Hollow Presbyterian Church Family Retreat (Pine Cove Retreat Center—Tyler, TX)

Wednesday October 4, 2017
ACTivators lead Worship at Homestead Senior Care Center in Denison

Saturday October 14, 2015
Homecoming “Kids College” (AC Campus)

Wednesday November 1, 2017
ACTivators lead Worship at Homestead Senior Care Center in Denison

Friday-Sunday November 3-5, 2017
Grace Presbytery Junior High Youthquake #1 (Gilmont Retreat Center—Gilmer, TX)

Friday-Sunday November 10-12, 2017
Santa Fe Presbytery Youth Retreat (Santa Fe, NM)

Friday-Sunday January 26-28, 2018
Grace Presbytery Senior High Youth Connection (AC Campus)

Wednesday February 7, 2018
ACTivators lead Worship at Homestead Senior Care Center in Denison

Friday-Sunday February 16-18, 2018
Palo Duro Presbytery WARP'D Retreat (Floydada, TX)

Friday-Sunday March 2-4, 2018
Arizona Presbyterian Youth Conference (Phoenix, AZ)

Wednesday March 7, 2018
ACTivators lead Worship at Homestead Senior Care Center in Denison

Wednesday April 4, 2018
ACTivators lead Worship at Homestead Senior Care Center in Denison

Friday-Sunday April 6-8 or 13-15, 2018
Indian Nations Presbytery Youthquake (Weatherford, OK)

Friday-Sunday April 6-8, 2018
Grace Presbytery Kidquake #1 at at Glen Lake

Friday-Sunday April 20 - 22, 2018
Kidquake #2 at Gilmont

Friday-Sunday April 27 - 29, 2018

Kidquake #3 at Gilmont

June 7-10, 2018

St. Philip Presbyterian Church, Houston All-Church Retreat (Mo-Ranch)

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Church Connection

On Sunday morning August 27, Wynne Chapel will host "Church Connection." Our goal is to encourage entering students who are interested in going to worship at a local church to gather in Wynne Chapel and meet up with current students, faculty, and staff who attend the various churches in town.

We have asked Austin College faculty and staff to be at Wynne Chapel from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. and accompany interested students to worship at their churches.

This will be a great opportunity for entering students to meet faculty and staff and attend Sunday morning worship in a local congregation.

Please join us on Sunday, August 27 for Church Connection.

See you there!

Covenant Presbyterian—10:50 a.m. Worship

First Baptist—9:45 a.m. Church School

First Christian (Denison)

First United Methodist (Mosaic)—9:45 a.m. Contemporary Worship

First United Methodist—11:00 a.m. Traditional Service

Legacy Bible—10:45 a.m. Worship

Sherman Bible—10:00 a.m. Worship

St. Mary's Roman Catholic—10:30 a.m. Mass

Trinity Lutheran—10:30 a.m. Worship

Waples United Methodist (Denison)—11:00 a.m. Denison

OPPORTUNITIES FAIR

Tuesday August 29, 2017

11 a.m.-1 p.m. in the Campus Mall

(the big sidewalk that runs through the middle of campus)

Come and learn about student organizations
at Austin College

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SUNDAY NIGHT WORSHIP

WITH COMMUNION

BEGINNING SUNDAY AUGUST 27

6:00 P.M. EVERY SUNDAY NIGHT

in the Small Chapel

(go in the Chapel entrance that's closest to the Wright Center—
not the big doors under the bell tower)

followed by dinner in the home of John Williams
or another professor or administrator.

B.S. in the W.C.

Bible Study in the Wright Center

5:30 p.m. Tuesdays, beginning August 29

in the Moseley Room (next door to the Dining Hall)

BRING YOUR TRAY AND YOUR BRAIN—WE'LL PROVIDE THE REST

AUSTIN COLLEGE NON-PROFIT, INTERNSHIP, AND VOLUNTEER FAIR

Thursday, September 14, 2017

11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

in the Wright Campus Center

Come learn about

- service opportunities,
- meaningful internships; and
- non-profit careers.

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Great Day of Service!

SAT. NOV. 4th

Cafeteria 8:30 A.M.

Sign up with your cluster.....

RAs get first choice of sites!!!!