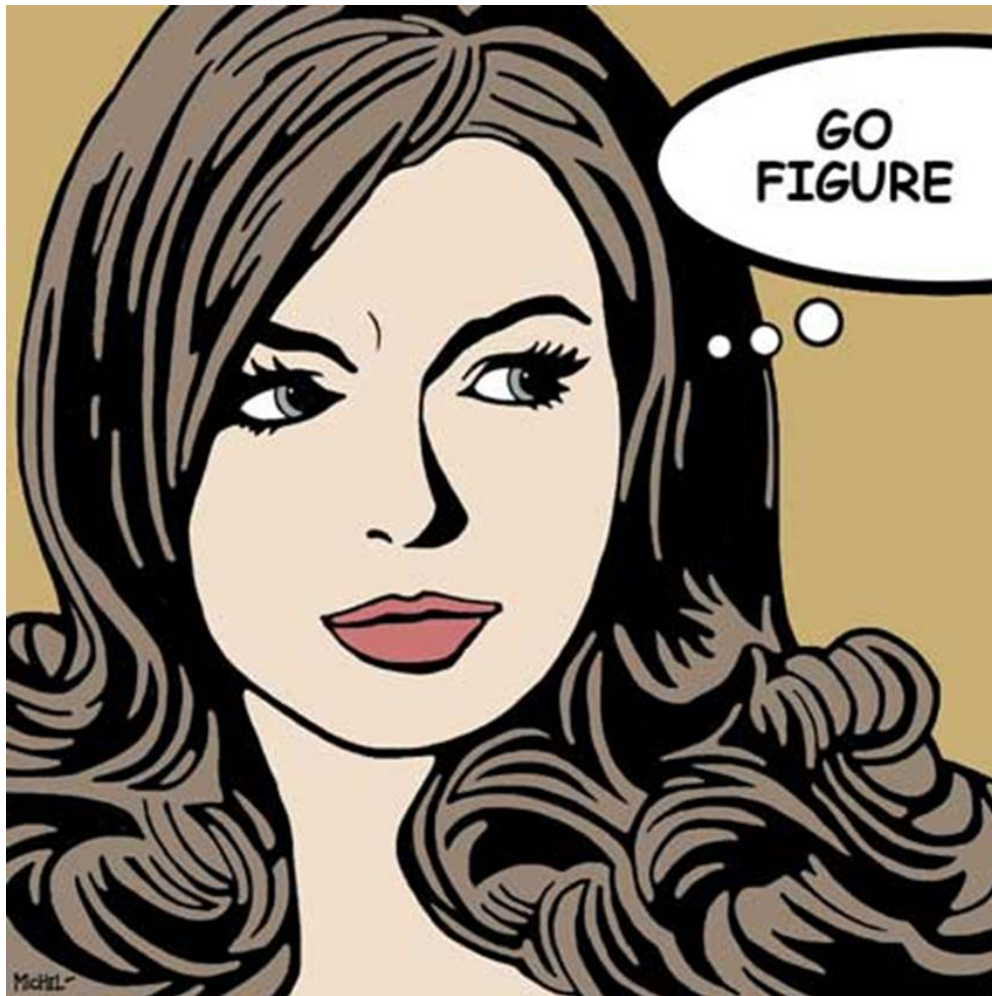


AColyte

Commencement 2018

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



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

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN...

At the precipice,
Lighting 300 fuses,
Awaiting the BANG!

*“Friends come and go, Lewis,
but the things you learn will always be yours,
to use as you will.”*

— Deborah Crombie, Kissed a Sad Goodbye

*So much that I don't know;
But there's less that I can't learn.*
--Tone Deaf Cowboys

Go figure.

--Deborah Crombie

Alumni Address at the Austin College
Phi Beta Kappa Induction
April 2018

Deborah Crombie said, “Go figure” during her talk at the AC Phi Beta Kappa induction ceremony last month.

That's a curious phrase.

I think the first time I came across it was on the cover of the book God Knows by Joseph Heller.

I never read that book. I think my parents did. It was around the house for a while when I was growing up.

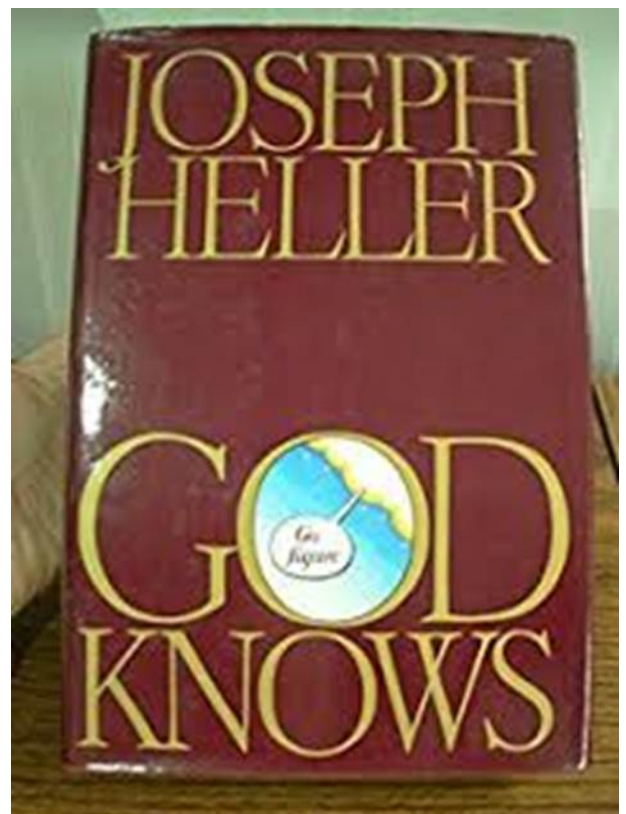
I remember being intrigued by the cover.

I think that cover is intended to represent God saying, “Go figure” to the biblical character David.

Young me wasn't sure exactly what “Go figure” meant.

Fast forward 40 or so years to Mabee Hall last month.

Deborah Crombie said, “Go figure.”



According to the Austin College website:

Deborah Crombie graduated in 1977 from Austin College with a degree in biology. But life takes turns, like a mystery unfolding. Her graduate work and travel revealed a passion for England—and for writing. Her liberal arts degree helped equip her with the discipline to pursue it. With her fictional characters Detective Superintendent Duncan Kincaid and Sergeant Gemma James, Deborah has filled the shelves with suspense novels over the last 20 years. A New York Times-Best Selling author, she released her 16th novel, *To Dwell in Darkness* in September and is at work on the next. (*that became Garden of Lamentations, released in 2017*). Deborah lives in McKinney, Texas, and travels often to England for research.

Deborah Crombie is a big deal.

She's a famous, widely-read author.

She's an AC Alumna.

And she said, "Go figure" during her most recent talk at AC.

She said it in the context of telling the story about how an erstwhile pre-Med Biology major at Austin College became a writer of British crime novels.

Go figure.

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The image above comes from the "I DIG ENGLISH" Blog spot by Karolina Pabich.

Below the image are these words:

random word of the day: GO FIGURE – bądź tu mądry, bez komentarza (often used sarcastically: How strange is that? Who would have thought? No idea why!)



I think that's Polish-ED.

But here's the deal.

Even though Ms. Crombie said, "Go figure" as if her transition from pre-Med Biology major to crime novelist was strange and inexplicable, we all know that's not exactly true.

In the words of the website blurb above, "her liberal arts degree helped equip her with the discipline to pursue her passion for England—and for writing."

At her talk last month, Crombie told us that the first thing she did after deciding to try her hand at writing a British crime novel was to gather and outline and carefully study the content and structure of her favorite books from that genre.

That's the most Austin College thing she did.

Faced with changing plans and circumstances and recognizing emerging passions and interests, Deborah Crombie *figured it out*.

She brought to bear all the resources of her Austin College Liberal arts education and did a new thing.

More about that in a minute.

But first, a brief excursion into the Book of Genesis.

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The first two chapters of Genesis include two distinct but related stories of creation.

They weren't written to be Science texts and shouldn't be read as such.

They are attempts to offer language to a particular community as it thinks about

- what it might mean to be together here and now and
- how we might determine which things matter more than other things.

Genesis 1:26 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."

According to that verse, to be human is to be created in the image of God and to have "dominion" over pretty much everything else.

That seems pretty cool but it's not entirely clear what it means.

And the whole "dominion" business feels kinda dangerous.

Somehow it feels significant that the verse says "let *them* have dominion over" all that stuff. That suggests that this dominion is shared by all of us. It's something we need to do together. Carefully.

Through the centuries, many individuals have interpreted this notion of dominion as divine permission to extract, hoard, and exploit the resources of our little planet.

That still goes on a lot.

It's pretty clearly a dead-end path.

Dominion connotes responsibility and joint dominion connotes joint responsibility.

That feels like a hard conversation to have in the USA in 2018.

So?

We all need to be ready to instigate and participate in that conversation.

If we're going to call ourselves educated, we all need to be prepared to discuss and advocate for what astronomer, cosmologist, astrophysicist, astrobiologist, and author Carl Sagan called "elementary planetary hygiene."

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Genesis 2:18 says:

18 Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner."

It doesn't feel right to try to do this by ourselves.

It's not good for us to be alone.

Life is a team sport.

Which leads to Genesis 2:19

19 So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.

As many of you know, I love that verse.

After creating everything;

after creating humans in the image of God;

after calling and enabling human beings to have dominion over all creation;

after recognizing that it is not good for humans to be alone;

God invites the human to be a partner in creation.

God made animals and "brought them to the man to see what he would call them."

This is God helping the human figure out what it means to bear God's image and to have dominion.

God doesn't bring animals to Adam and then identify them for him.

God essentially says, "Here. **FIGURE IT OUT.**"

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Sunday morning, Austin College will award 286 BA degrees and 14 MAT degrees.

Lots of us will say lots of words during the ceremony.

And I think all of those words will boil down to 2 words:

Go figure.

But those words won't be offered in the sarcastic way that Karolina Pabich defines "go figure" (*How strange is that? Who would have thought? No idea why!*).

Instead, they will be a charge to each graduate.

Go.

Figure.

Leave this season of your lives.

Take the world by storm.

Don't wait for somebody else to solve all the problems and heal all the wounds.

Keep thinking.

Keep reading.

Keep listening.

Keep learning.

Keep talking.

Figure it out.

We need you.

Until September, I remain,
Just Another Cowboy Preacher,
Happily Thinking Up Names for More Animals,

JOHN WILLIAMS
Chaplain