

# AColyte

May 15, 2020

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



## CHARGE & BENEDICTION

### **HUGE GRATITUDE**

to the 2019-20 Sallie Majors Religious Life Interns—

Patrick Blasingame, Addie Pederson, Lois Bronaugh,

Bridget Tolle, Santos Botello, Emma Page,

Sallie Roo (pictured but not an intern), and Spencer Dirk

Thanks for being steady colleagues in a turbulent year.

## TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN...

May 15, 2020

Reminiscing and Dreaming

Experiencing Typical May Sentimentalism

Not Worried

*Ain't afraid of moonlight  
Ain't afraid of freedom  
Love will make you crazy  
But your soul will keep you sane  
Singing to the starlight  
Over the horizon  
Open to the pleasure  
Equal to the pain  
--Kris Kristofferson*

*I hope you find something to love  
Something to do when you feel like giving up  
A song to sing or a tale to tell  
Something to love, it'll serve you well.  
--Jason Isbell*

In the Austin College Roomote Baccalaureate that will be posted at 7:00pm Saturday May 16, I deliver the Charge and Benediction. The underlined words below in **BOLD ALL CAPS** are what I actually say on that video. The additional text below those words are what I meant, but didn't have time to say out loud:

Okay seniors – this part is about over.

The world is about to turn.

### **NOW GO.**

The world is full of question marks.

You don't know what's going to happen.

But you know who you are.

You know where the rest of us are if you encounter a rough patch.

But you've got to go.

### **GO OUT INTO THE WORLD.**

The world desperately needs what we have in #ROONation.

The world desperately needs to learn how to embrace pluralism and find unity in diversity.

The world desperately needs people who think carefully and act responsibly.

The world desperately needs you to continue to identify, develop, and share your particular gifts because your giftedness is, and should always be, good news for the whole world.

Embrace that, don't shrink from it.

Go.

Get busy.

## **BE PEOPLE OF PEACE.**

That means more than just not being violent – although it certainly means that.

Don't be violent.

But peace is not just the absence of violence – it's the presence of harmony and right relationship, humility and patience, graciousness and forgiveness.

It's the recognition that sometimes it's more important to be loving than to be right.

[see Acts 16:36 and John 20:25-26–ED.]

## **HAVE COURAGE**

That's gonna be hard sometimes.

I guarantee it.

Face adversity with your eyes wide open.

Don't look for others to blame.

Be dependable.

Suck it up.

Don't weaken.

But, also, don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it.

[see Acts 25:27–ED.]

## **HOLD ON TIGHT TO ALL THAT IS GOOD**

Romans 12:9 says, "Hold fast to what is good."

My friend and mentor **John Evans** (Austin College '64) used to say "hold on tight to all that is good" when delivering benedictions.

I like that language, even though the proper grammar would actually be "hold on *tightly* to all that is good."

(Sometimes there are more important things than proper grammar).

I like the image of "holding on tight to all that is good" (partially because I love John).

I sometimes worry that all of us who are so justifiably proud of our ability to think critically will fall into the trap of exclusively using our critical skills to point out shortcomings and foolish illusions.

We should never apologize for popping balloons of empty thought and lazy rhetoric when they need to be popped.

But I don't see the value of an education that only tears things down; an education that is eager to show the world that there is nothing quite good enough to meet our high standards.

It seems to me that one of the best uses of our intellectual and academic skills is to identify, acknowledge, point out, share, and preserve *good* things.

## **RETURN NO ONE EVIL FOR EVIL**

Don't ignore evil.

Call it out.

Name it.

But don't keep score.

Don't get trapped in the revenge spiral.

Do your best to transcend, outgrow, and put away the desire for revenge — no matter what real and deep injuries you may suffer.

That's really difficult, but it's worthwhile.

Evil is never overcome by more evil.

Don't pick scabs.

Go forward and heal.

[see Romans 12:17—ED.]

## **SUPPORT THE WEAK**

Be compassionate.

Recognize that some people are having a harder time than others of us.

Do what you can to help them.

"Support the weak" is a direct quote from Acts 20:35.

That's good and concise, but the idea is fleshed out a little more in Deuteronomy 10:17-19:

*For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords,  
the great God, mighty and awesome,  
who is not partial and takes no bribe,  
who executes justice for the orphan and the widow,  
and who loves the strangers,  
providing them food and clothing.  
You shall also love the stranger,  
for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.*

That's a way of telling people something like, "If you want to know how to act appropriately in your relationship with God and each other, find somebody who no one else is looking out for – like orphans or widows or strangers – and you look out for them."

Educated people like us ought to be able to recognize when somebody is having a hard time – and to do what we can to help them out.

## **STRENGTHEN THE FAINTHEARTED**

Call your grandparents.

Encourage scared children.

Go to the funeral and sign the book.

Listen to your anxious friend tell the same story they told last time.

Slow down a little.

Show up for each other.

Pay attention.

Be ready sometimes to allow yourself to be leaned upon.

[see I Thessalonians 5:14 or  
The Gospel according to Bill Withers <https://youtu.be/f0Z-MySzAac>—ED.]

## **HONOR ALL PEOPLE**

This is more about us than them.

Everybody ought to do this.

Everybody ought to honor all people.

But not everybody does.

We can't control what they do.

But we can control what we do.

The world is full of voices that disregard and diminish others.

Don't add to that chorus.

That gets complicated when you start thinking about how to honor bigots and abusers.

Push back against their words and actions.

Try not to ever let them get away with it.

Call them out.

But never give yourself permission to disregard and diminish those who disregard and diminish others.

[see Philippians 2:29—ED.]

## **LOVE AND SERVE THE WORLD**

This one is a little complicated.

Places in the Bible like Deuteronomy 10:12 and Joshua 22:5 call believers to "love and serve the Lord."

That's a perfectly legitimate sentiment.

But when I'm delivering the Benediction at an Austin College all-campus event, an invitation to "love and serve the Lord" means different things to different members of our community.

We don't necessarily love and serve the same Lord, and some of us don't really think in terms of loving and serving any Lord.

But we do all share the same planet.

And I think we're all in favor of endeavoring to live responsibly and carefully on our fragile earth.

While an invitation to "love and serve the earth" might be appropriate, I think a call to "love and serve the world" is more inclusive.

It's an invitation to love and serve the earth *and* all its inhabitants.

This gets even more complicated for Christians who try to take seriously the words of Paul in the New Testament books of Romans and First and Second Corinthians.

Romans 12:2 says *do not be conformed to this world*;

1 Corinthians 3:19 says *the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God*;

2 Corinthians 4:4 says *the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers.*"

Paul was trying to help his readers recognize and adopt a new set of categories and vocabulary as they thought about which things mattered more than other things. He was inviting them to get their brains beyond the habits of oppression, superstition, and injustice that had characterized their lives before they learned the Jesus story.

The "world" that he was seeking to transcend was the world of violence, abuse, and death.

But that's not all the Bible says about "the world."

Genesis 1:31 says *God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.*

Psalms 24:1 says *the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.*

And John 3:16 says the reason Jesus came in the first place was because *God so loved the world.*

I think I'm on pretty solid biblical footing when I encourage Austin College people to love and serve the world.

I'm gonna keep doing that.

## **SHARE WHAT YOU HAVE**

In Luke 19:8, Zacchaeus responds to the experience of being noticed, addressed by name, and invited to share his gifts by telling Jesus *Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor.*

He doesn't vow to share his stuff so that Jesus will notice him, call him by name, and invite him into the story.

All of that has already happened.

He's not motivated by self-interest.

He's motivated by gratitude.

Gratitude is a good way to engage the world.

Pay more attention to what you have to offer than what you think you deserve to get.

Approach your life with a posture of abundance, not a posture of scarcity.

## **SPEAK TRUTH TENDERLY AND LOVINGLY**

Isaiah 40:2 says *Speak tenderly to Jerusalem.*

Ephesians 4:15 talks of *speaking the truth in love.*

In 2017, Volkswagen was fined \$2.8 billion for “rigging two of its diesel engines to pass U.S. emissions tests.”

[That's from NBC News—ED.]

That means they tinkered with their engines to make it look like they didn't produce as much pollution as they actually did.

Earlier this year, Wells Fargo Bank paid a \$3.3 billion fine and admitted that *between 2002 and 2016, it falsified bank records, harmed the credit ratings of customers, unlawfully misused their personal information and wrongfully collected millions of dollars in fees and interest.*

[That's from CNN.com—ED.]

That means Wells Fargo gave accounts to its customers that they didn't ask for and then charged them fees for those accounts.

Earlier this month, *former Blue Bell CEO Paul Kruse was charged ...with conspiracy in connection with the 2015 listeria outbreak that was linked to three deaths. The [U.S. Department of Justice](#) announced the same day that the Texas-based ice company agreed to plead guilty to shipping contaminated products and pay more than \$19 million in fines. Federal prosecutors in Texas accuse Kruse of attempting to cover up the outbreak traced back to the ice cream company's facilities. He was charged with conspiracy and six counts of wire fraud.*

[That's from the Ft. Worth Star-Telegram—ED.]

That means the government thinks that Blue Bell knew it might have had listeria (a disease-causing bacteria) in some of its plants but shipped ice cream from those facilities anyway.

Somebody at Volkswagen, Wells-Fargo, and Blue Bell knew that those companies were behaving dishonestly.

Don't be that person.

As much as you can, speak truth tenderly and lovingly.

But don't lie.

## CLEAN UP YOUR OWN MESSSES

The second thing Zacchaeus says in Luke 19:8 is *and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.*

That's a promise to clean up whatever messes he has made.

If you know you've made a mess, clean it up.

Don't expect or wait for somebody else to do it for you.

Make it right and then move on.

Be Roosponsible.

## USE THE BRAINS GOD GAVE YOU

Figure it out.

Think about stuff.

Make some decisions.

Genesis 2:18 says *Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner."*

God's gonna go on and create Eve in Genesis 2:20, but we need to be sure not to overlook Genesis 2:19:

*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.*

Back in Genesis 1:26, we learn that the human was created in the image of God.

Genesis 2:19 is the first suggestion of what that might mean.

God does not say, "Okay human—this is a horse, this is a paramecium, and this is a kangaroo and so on..."

Instead, God essentially says, "I don't know, what do *you* think?"

That's not the hyper-functioning OCD "Calvinist" God who already has everything planned out and already knows everything that is ever going to happen.

That's a God who chooses to allow the first human to make real choices that have real consequences.

It's a suggestion that to be created in God's image is to be able to be God's partner in the ongoing process of creation.

It's a suggestion that—to quote a t-shirt I saw somewhere—"God gave us brains and expects us to use them."

Use the brain God gave you.

## WASH YOUR HANDS

This one is new this year.

And the biblical foundation is a little janky.



Matthew 27:24 says *So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves."*

Psalms 73:13 says *All in vain I have kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.* It's really pretty simple.

There is a new virus among us humans.

Some people have it, even though they have no symptoms. They could still infect others.

We (presumably) don't want to infect others.

So we wash our hands (and wear masks in public).

Some of our fellow citizens have acted out and resisted what they think are unreasonable restrictions on their "freedom."

I didn't say this on the Baccalaureate video, but here's what I think about that:

I think I know the reason  
That those "patriotic" boys  
Show up with their rifles  
(I've read a little Freud)  
They just don't understand it  
The whole thing makes them mad  
Their guns won't kill the virus  
But their breath could kill my Dad  
It's just common sense  
Not too much to ask  
When you go out in public  
Wear a damn mask!

Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 19:19, Matthew 22:39, Mark 12:31, Luke 10:27, Romans 13:9, Galatians 5:14, and James 2:8 all say *Love your neighbor as yourself.* Any questions?

## **ACT LIKE GIFTED, BELOVED, CAPABLE, AND SAFE PEOPLE**

1 Peter 4:10 says *Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.*

### **Gifted.**

1 John 3:1 says *See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!*

### **Beloved.**

Genesis 2:19 says *whatever the human called every living creature, that was its name.*

### **Capable.**

Psalms 139:18 says *I come to the end – I am still with you,* and John 8:11 says *Neither do I condemn you.*

### **Safe.**

## **BECAUSE THAT REALLY IS WHAT YOU REALLY ARE**

1 John 3:1 says *See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.*

## **AND GO WITH THE FULL CONFIDENCE THAT THE GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE OF ALMIGHTY GOD ARE WITH US ALL; TODAY; TOMORROW; AND FORVER.**

2 Corinthians 13:13 says *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.*

Not everybody at Austin College is Christian, although most of us are.

But we all believe that we're part of a larger community, characters in a common narrative, and beneficiaries of a tradition that seeks to take the right things seriously.

## **SERIOUSLY.**

87 times in the Gospels, Jesus says something that is usually translated as "Verily" or "Truly." "Seriously" is an appropriate synonym.

The Greek word is **Αμην**.

In English, that's

## **AMEN.**

Until Next Time, I Remain,

Just Another Cowboy Preacher,

Wishing Peace on All Y'all,

And Hoping You'll Continue to Be "Open to the pleasure and Equal to the Pain"

JOHN WILLIAMS

Chaplain

**CONGRATULATIONS  
TO THE 2020-21  
SALLIE MAJORS  
RELIGIOUS LIFE INTERNS:**

Makayla Dunlap  
Kaitlin Kelley  
Emily O'Neil  
Elizabeth Parker  
Nancy Piñeda-Gama  
Emma Rooney

The logo is set against a yellow background with maroon borders at the top and bottom. It features the text "AUSTIN COLLEGE" in an upward-curving arc at the top, followed by "• 2020 •" in the center. Below this, the word "BACCALAUREATE" is written in a large, bold, serif font, flanked by two horizontal dotted lines. At the bottom, the text "ONE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-FIRST YEAR" is written in a smaller, all-caps serif font.

AUSTIN COLLEGE  
• 2020 •  
BACCALAUREATE  
ONE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-FIRST YEAR

Austin College will host a Virtual Baccalaureate at 7 p.m. on May 16, coinciding with the originally scheduled Baccalaureate service for the Class of 2020 on campus. All are welcome to participate in the service live on [Facebook](#). [Read More...](#)