A SERVICE OF PRAYER AND REFLECTION
AT AUSTIN COLLEGE
June 2, 2020

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Friends,
My name is John Williams.
I’m Chaplain and Director of Church Relations here at Austin College,
And I want to begin by thanking you for your presence
at this service of Prayer and Reflection
and thanking the Students, Faculty, Staff members, and Administrators
who are helping lead this service.

In light of recent events in our nation
regarding the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis,
We at Austin College believe this is an appropriate
and important time for us to gather,
To engage in prayer and reflection,
And to celebrate and affirm our institutional commitment to racial ethnic,
religious, and cultural diversity.

Nine different times, from the Book of Leviticus to the Book of James, the Bible says

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

In the Book of Amos,
Chapter 5, verses 23-24,
God tells the people of Israel

Take away from me the noise of your songs;
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.
But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.
In a 2014 poem called “Citizen: An American Lyric” poet Claudia Rankine wrote:

“because white men can’t police their imaginations
black men are dying.”

In a speech in St. Louis on March 22, 1964, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. King said,

*We must learn to live together as [family] or perish together as fools.”*

In his speech accepting the Nobel peace Prize on December 10, 1964, Dr. King said

*I still believe that we shall overcome.
This faith can give us courage to face the uncertainties of the future.
It will give our tired feet new strength as we continue our forward stride toward the city of freedom.
When our days become dreary with low-hovering clouds and our nights become darker than a thousand midnights, we will know that we are living in the creative turmoil of a genuine civilization struggling to be born.*

In a sermon in Selma, Alabama on March 8, 1965, Dr. King said

*A man dies when he refuses to stand up for that which is right.
A man dies when he refuses to stand up for justice.
A man dies when he refuses to take a stand for that which is true.*

Friends, today we gather as Austin College to remember and affirm our values, And to take a stand for that which is true.
A PRAYER FOR THIS MOMENT  
(written by Austin College Trustee Rev. Dr. Karl Travis)

The Spirit cries out,  
“LET ME BREATHE!

In your streets and into your hearts,  
I yearn to blow free.

But you are a stiff-necked people,  
kneeling on my neck.

Where injustice stands over the downtrodden,  
let me breathe.

When racism blinds you to the experience of others,  
let me breathe.

As bigotry finds voice in the high places,  
let me breathe.

When avoidance and convenience sanction unanswered wrongs,  
let me breathe.

Each time privilege cloaks unseemly truth,  
let me breathe.

Every time inhumanity poses as righteousness,  
let me breathe.

Let me breathe “from Stone Mountain of Georgia,”  
from “Lookout Mountain of Tennessee,”  
from “every hill” and “molehill”  
and from every “mountainside.”

Let me breathe in YOU, for I am the Lord God,  
and I am choking, panting, gasping to be heard,  
in all languages, in all places, for all people.
Our Mission Statement says that Austin College values
Personal Growth,
Justice,
Community,
Service,
Academic Excellence,
Intellectual & Personal Integrity, and
Participation in Community Life.

Because we value personal growth,
Austin College seeks to embrace diversity,
eliminate inequalities in our campus community,
and foster critical inquiry and ethical reflection.

Because we value justice,
Austin College resists all efforts
based on race, religious identity, or nationality
to limit the ability of any person
to participate fully and safely in the life of our institution.

We call upon our government
To make and enforce just laws that recognize and respect the rights of all people.

Because we value service,
Austin College encourages and enables our students and alumni to identify,
develop, and share their particular gifts
within the various communities in which they participate.
We believe we are all gifted people.
And we believe that gifted people should work to ensure that their
giftedness is good news for others,
Especially for those of our neighbors who are having a hard time.

Because we value community, Austin College encourages and fosters
respectful interaction between community members
from various racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds.
We encourage our neighbors and fellow citizens to seek opportunities for respectful interaction with community members from different racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, or socioeconomic groups.

Because we value Academic Excellence and Intellectual & Personal integrity, Austin College requires all students to take courses in Global Diversity and Systems of Power, Privilege, and Inequality.

We invite and encourage our government, our neighbors, and our fellow citizens to embrace and value the diversity of our society and our world, and to address and eliminate unjust systems of power, privilege, and inequality.

Because we value participation in community life, The students, faculty, and staff of Austin College celebrate and affirm racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, political, and international diversity.

We believe our diversity makes us stronger, And we encourage and invite our government, our neighbors, and our fellow citizens to work together to build and maintain communities in which all people are safe, cherished, and equally respected.

Because we are, and have always been, formally related to the Presbyterian Church, Austin College honors the dignity and worth of every person.

We call upon our government, our neighbors, and our fellow citizens to honor the dignity and worth of every person, Regardless of skin color, Political opinion, Sexuality, Gender identity, or Economic status.

This is us. Diverse, inclusive, and united.
BENEDICTION

And now,
as we continue our individual lives
and our life together as Austin College,
I encourage and invite each of you
to be people of 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.

ALL people.

Love and serve the world.
Share what you have.
Speak truth tenderly and lovingly.
Clean up your own messes.
Use the brains God gave you.
Act like gifted, beloved, capable, safe people.
Because that really IS what you really ARE.

And go with the full confidence
That the grace, mercy, and peace of Almighty God
ARE with us all;

Today;
Tomorrow;
and Forever.
Seriously.
Amen.