

AColyte

January 22, 2021

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



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Rev. John Williams, Ph.D., Editor

900 N. Grand Ave.

Suite 61647

Sherman, TX 75090

903.813.2220

jwilliams@austincollege.edu

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN...

Wynne Chapel
January 2021

*Hate cannot drive out hate;
only love can do that.*
--Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

*[Chris] wrote about making the conscious decision
to love everyone around him.*
--Dr. Tom Blake,
January 19, 2021

*In the thick of night,
It'll hold up in the light.
Put love above everything else
And the rest will take care of itself.*
--Webb Wilder and the Beatnecks
(Out of the 2,943 songs I have on Spotify,
this one literally came on as I was writing this piece.)

Most of you reading this are aware that Tuesday's Austin College Zoom Memorial Service remembering and celebrating the life of AC Senior **Chris Miller** was briefly interrupted by one or two persons saying vulgar, offensive, racist, and sexist things that we all unfortunately heard.

I don't want to go into much detail about that incident because it was a profoundly upsetting experience for me personally and I don't want to trigger further anxious responses for our fellow Roos who were understandably traumatized by those reprehensible actions.

My stomach still hurts when I think about those moments.

But I don't want this week to end without sharing a couple thoughts.

First, and most importantly: **THEY DID NOT STOP US.**

Thanks to **Dr. Jennifer Johnson-Cooper** and others at the Zoom meeting, we were able to silence those who sought to disrupt the service. We made no acknowledgement or response to the ones who attempted to derail us.

We continued with a beautiful service in which 6 current students (**Boston Billings, Ashley Elliott, Emma Martinez, Nathan McKenzie, Emily O'Neil, Jaide Vidal**) 3 professors (**Tom Blake, Jennifer Johnson-Cooper, Ashley Tharayil**), and I led over 100 students, faculty, staff, and alumni as we remembered and celebrated Chris by

- reading scripture,
- praying together, and
- talking about the ways his presence among us blessed – and will continue to bless – us as individuals and as a college community.

We continued.

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My week began at 8:30 Monday morning as I attended the annual **Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Celebration** that Austin College hosts every year along with the Sherman Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, the Grayson County Chapter of the NAACP, and the two Rotary Clubs that operate in Grayson County.

It was good to see friends from the community and to hear inspiring words from my friend and former neighbor **Terrence Steele** (who is currently Assistant Sherman City Manager) and AC Senior **Victoria Gilbert** – who I hope will publish her outstanding “Ode to Literature” speech.

It was a great morning.

Dr. King has been on my mind this week.

When the service was interrupted Tuesday night, I immediately thought of the words from Dr. King that are quoted above.

Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.

Here's a longer quote from a book by Dr. King called *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*:

*Hate begets hate; violence begets violence;
toughness begets a greater toughness.
We must meet the forces of hate with the power of love...
Our aim must never be to defeat or humiliate...
but to win...friendship and understanding.*

*The ultimate weakness of violence
is that it is a descending spiral
begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy,
instead of diminishing evil, [violence] multiplies it.
Through violence you may murder the liar,
but you cannot murder the lie,
nor establish the truth.
Through violence you may murder the hater,
but you do not murder hate.*

*In fact, violence merely increases hate.
Returning violence for violence multiplies violence,
adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars.
Darkness cannot drive out darkness;
only light can do that.
**Hate cannot drive out hate;
only love can do that.***

That's what I thought about as the service was interrupted on Tuesday.

We didn't stop.

We didn't scream.

We didn't fight back.

We continued to express our love for our friend and to lift up and celebrate his love for God, for us, and for our community.

That's how we responded to those hateful actions.

By articulating and celebrating and embodying love.

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Wednesday was **Jan Serve** day at AC.

The Austin College Service Station Board organizes a day of service every January. Most years, Jan Serve involves hosting a huge Special Olympics athletic meet in the Mason Complex and enabling students to go into Sherman Schools and read to elementary school students.

COVID nixed that this year.

So, instead, the Service Station Board pivoted and organized the '**Roos Reading Library**'. That's a program that aims to provide videos of Austin College students, faculty, staff and alumni reading stories for children.

The program will have a full, campus-wide introduction after the Spring semester begins, and you'll all have the opportunity to participate by being recorded reading a children's book.

But a few students and I got a jump on the process on Wednesday. Some Service Station Board members made videos of us reading some good children's books.

I read a book about Dr. King called Martin's Big Words.

It felt really good to do *that* the morning after what happened on Tuesday night.

Those videos, and others that will be created this Fall, will be made available on the Austin College website to *any* class, or family, or individual child who wants to access them – anywhere in the world.

We can offer that. And so we will.

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The last scripture passage read at Chris' Memorial service on Tuesday (Romans 8:38-39) was chosen and read by AC Senior **Boston Billings**.

I think it's the perfect passage to help us all process what happened Tuesday.

In Romans 8:38-39 Paul is writing to a Church in Rome that is facing hatred and persecution, violence and trauma.

In the face of all that, Paul writes in Romans 8:31:

*What then are we to say about these things?
If God is for us, who is against us?*

That is, ignore the haters.

The hate won't last.

And then come the famous, inspiring, and reassuring words that Boston read to us on Tuesday:

*For I am convinced that neither death, nor life,
nor angels, nor rulers,
nor things present, nor things to come,
nor powers, nor height, nor depth,
[nor COVID,
nor racist cowards,
nor hateful words and actions,]
nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

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I don't think we should forget what happened on Tuesday night.

But we must remember that we didn't stop.

We continued.

Love outlasts hate.

Always.

ALWAYS.

Chris knew that.

And so do we.

Until next time, I remain,
Just Another Cowboy Preacher,
Grateful to Live and Work Among People Who Love and Who Serve,

JOHN WILLIAMS
Chaplain