

Augustana Mission Sunday
1 Samuel 16:14-23; Mark 10:13-16; Matthew 25:14-29
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Throughout this season of Easter our biblical texts have emphasized how the resurrected Jesus has shown up in the most unusual places; on the highway, over some broiled trout on the shore, behind the closed and locked doors amid frightened disciples. Not one of these Easter appearances happens in the context of worship. That must mean that God shows up in many ordinary places other than worship. And that, in a nutshell, is the good news for today.

There is a difference between worship through word and sacrament and any other ordinary thing that we might dream up to do. In worship God has *promised* to show up. In worship God is the actor, and you and I are the receivers. Worship doesn't come from "in here," but comes from without and ends up, "in here." Worship is not so much what *we do* as it is what *God does*. What we receive in worship, among other things, is forgiveness, God's presence and word, and God's invitation to discipleship. Those and more are promises. In worship you can count on God to act in these ways, you can look for God's action in the songs, prayers, scripture of worship. You can expect God to act here, because God has promised as much.

And what do you do with a promise from God? You keep it close, and live as though God will keep God's every promise. On those good days when I am not too distracted by my cares, when God can successfully take me by the ears and speak God's word of promise persuasively to me, then I take God at God's word. If someone makes you a big promise – let's say it is a truly outrageous promise – you're job is to hold them to it. Religious faith is not a product we proudly hand over to God hoping for the best. Religious faith is taking God at God's word, *trusting* that what God is giving me in worship will actually make a difference in my life. Worship, let me remind you again, is something God does to us. Worship is what it feels like to have God's gracious promises done to us.

You and I certainly dream up all sorts of things to do in life that isn't worship. Just as in all those Easter texts Jesus may well show up, working and doing God's gracious will. And I've already clued you in that this is the good news today. The only thing missing is God's promise.

The ministry of a congregation is much more than worship. Today, I would like to outline for you our congregation's partnership with other adventures which may not be worship as I've explained but are fully adventures in which God may surely turn up. I've chosen some biblical texts that suggest God's presence in those adventures.

His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things.

In 1971, the Augustana congregation initiated a foundation. Its purpose is

. . . to encourage and support projects or undertakings 1) which would seem likely to enrich or uplift in some special way, the spiritual life of Augustana 2) which would provide some worthy addition or improvement to Augustana's facilities, that seems beyond achievement through other channels, 3) which would give needed assistance or support to a worthy individual or family, or to some worthy Christian enterprise.

The foundation is not separately incorporated. It is as much a ministry of the congregation as the worship or property committees. Your congregation council appoints members of the foundation committee, establishes guidelines and priorities for grants and receives at least quarterly reports about their ministry.

Churches, community organizations, Augustana students of Lutheran colleges and seminaries, civic groups, mission groups from around the world, and even the newly baptized make application to the foundation committee. From the proceeds of the foundation's investments grants are awarded that make all sorts of ministry, community improvement, education possible. Recent grants on an annualized basis have been in the \$70,000 to \$80,000 range. Your estate gifts make those grants possible.

The deliberations and decisions of a foundation is not worship, but I and others can attest that God regularly shows up in the financial decisions of this Augustana Lutheran Church ministry. I would like to point out to you Rebecca Shandrick, chair of the foundation.

And [Jesus] took [the little children] up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

The Augustana Early Learning center was founded in 1971. It currently hosts 100 children from 18 months to 3rd grade. Their waiting list is a year long. The Early Learning Center was recently accredited by the National Association for Young Children, the oldest and most prestigious certification available. They have received a four star rating for Denver preschools. The Center is not separately incorporated. It is a nonsectarian ministry of the Augustana congregation, which accepts students of all races and creeds.

Over the last several years the relationship between the congregation and the center has been greatly enriched. I meet and greet center families at least a couple of times a year. Students of the center have historically been major participants in our Summer Vacation Bible School. Paula Keller is a full member of the staff, participating in staff meetings and retreats. She brings valuable collaboration. Members of Augustana regularly read stories with the children. Voluntary release time biblical storytelling is now provided by the Augustana congregation.

Of course the educational process at the Early Learning Center is not worship, but I have often seen God show up in the kids and families of that center. I would now like to identify for you Paula Keller, the center administrator.

David took the lyre and played it with his hand, and Saul would be relieved and feel better.

Augustana Arts was formed in 1997. Shortly thereafter it incorporated as a separate 501-(c)-3 in order to qualify for a broader range of arts grants. The mission of Augustana Arts is to “gather community, support the arts and delight the spirit.” Augustana Arts elects its own board. Its relationship with the congregation is guided by a letter of agreement that is ratified annually by both congregation and Augustana Arts board.

Augustana Arts is well-known for its concert series and outreach programs. They support the arts through music education, workshops and performance opportunities for emerging artists. They delight the spirit through outreach performances at prisons, nursing homes, hospitals and hospice centers. Augustana Arts’ program of City Strings provides subsidized music instruction to children who qualify for free lunch programs. Its program of the Augustana Institute of Music provides an infrastructure where teachers and students can meet for music education.

More than 7,000 audience members will participate in Augustana Arts' activities during the course of the 2009-10 season, with performances ranging from the international critically acclaimed a cappella vocal group, The King's Singers, to Matt Savage, a 17-year gifted jazz pianist.

By now, you know the drill: Augustana Arts is not worship, but you that have participated in its mission are well aware that God shows up in all that they do. I would now like to identify for you Marsha Temple, Executive Director and Wes Munsil, chair of the board.

The season of Easter is not about rearranging molecules and explaining resurrection through biology or physics. Easter is that season in which the one who was crucified shows up in the most unusual places: on the highway, over some broiled trout on the beach. Through the ministries of your congregation Christ shows up on the spreadsheets of a foundation, in the smile of a four year old in the Early Learning Center, in the learning and performances of Augustana Arts. And that, as you have been told, is the good news for today.

Gift-giving God. We give thanks for the Augustana Foundation, the Augustana Early Learning Center, and Augustana Arts. May our partnerships with them be fruitful. Help us be aware of your presence in the ministries and work of each of these organizations. Amen.

