

3-29-2018

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A. T. Lundholm: His Life and Work in Historical Context, 1875-1969

Alina Lundholm

Course: Scandinavian Studies Directed Study

Instructor: Mark Safstrom

Winter Trimester 2017-2018

Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois

This course was designed to reach a number of objectives. I was required to research my family and their ties to Augustana College. My main objective was to read various Scandinavian texts that related to the immigrant experience. These texts included *Nordic Immigration to North America*, H. Arnold Barton's *A folk divided : homeland Swedes and Swedish Americans, 1840-1940*, and a historical fiction work, *The Emigrants* by Vilhelm Moberg. Through my researching at the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center as well as my own work digging into my family's personal collection, I decided to focus my paper on my great-grandfather, Algot Theodore Lundholm. This choice was made obvious because of Algot's life: he was a Swedish immigrant and had numerous ties to Augustana College, the seminary, and the Augustana Synod that were integral to the bulk of this work. This paper serves to illuminate the experience of a Scandinavian-American on a grand scale while tying the big picture to the narrow focus of my great-grandfather and his life's work, most particularly his devotion to his Lutheran faith and how this connected him to the Augustana community.

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Dr. Safstrom

Winter Term 2017-2018

March 29, 2018

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“Dear Lord, when Thou seest that my work is
is done, Let me not linger on. With
waning powers a down the weary hours, A
workless worker in a world of work. But
just call me home, and I shall come, Yea,
right gladly I shall come!”¹

Towards the end of his life, my great-grandfather wrote extensively. When an aging man writes two versions of his autobiography, reminiscence and reflection are not far from his mind. Algot Theodore Lundholm had much to reflect on during his autumn years. The first edition of his autobiography is dated 1963; my great-grandfather was at the age of 88. Born before the turn of the century and passing away at the end of the tumultuous 60s, Reverend Dr. Lundholm was a witness to immense change in our world and contributed to this change as much as he could. In his writings, he writes acutely about all that has changed in his lifetime. He writes: “some day we shall know the way for all things in our lives. Then we shall understand and be at peace with ourselves”². His ending notes are similar to these lines. Algot questions certain paths his life took; he questions the unexpected death of his firstborn, Einar, in the prime of Einar’s life; he questions the strange period of his life teaching at the Augustana Seminary, which left him with many hurt questions, referring to this period in only vague terms. However, he never once questions his faith, and the Lord remained his one constant.

¹ Lundholm, Algot Theodore. “Autobiography of Algot Theodore Lundholm” (First ed. Minneapolis, Minnesota: author’s personal collection, 1963), 11.

² Ibid., 10.

In the early seventeenth century, the attraction of a New World in the West tickled the ears of many Europeans. As settlers trickled across the Atlantic, brothers, uncles, cousins, and other various family members began to follow. This erupted into the mass migration—The Great Change in the words of my great-grandfather—that centered itself in the middle of the eighteenth century in regards to the Swedish population. The poor members of the working class were particularly drawn to this new, opportunistic land. As seen through Vilhelm Moberg's *The Emigrants*, the New World was attractive to impoverished farmers. Karl Oskar, the head of the fictionalized family, is enticed by whispers of opportunity and success. The farm Karl inherited from his father Nils is riddled with endless stones as well as misfortune. No matter how hard Karl and his family work, their mortgage rises steadily and their debt piles on more and more. The decision to move to America is obvious. This was a choice that was clear for many real life Swedes, including my great-grandfather's family. This paper will briefly sketch and follow the life of my great-grandfather, A.T. Lundholm. I will be drawing from my great-grandfather's own work, *Women of the Bible*, and his two autobiographies. While following his life, I will also draw comparisons to various works such as Moberg's *The Emigrants*, Faith Ingwersen's *Nordic Immigration to North America*, and *A Folk Divided* by H. Arnold Barton to name a few. I hope to address the hopes and ideals of the Swedish immigrant during that time period and compile a view of family life and community within the Swedish-American experience.

Take any immigrant experience and examine it closely. We wonder at the reasons why ancestors left their homelands; the decision to uproot one's livelihoods and to leave friends and other family members behind is a significant change for any family to willingly undergo, but when taking into account the time period of the Great Migration, the push to join this transatlantic experience was far too attractive a prospect to ignore. It was the equivalent of a flu

epidemic, in the healthiest sense. One of the biggest factors for migration was “triggered by disastrous crop failures in 1867 and 1868, which caused widespread misery and ruined large numbers of smallholders and tenant farmers”³. We examine Ireland’s Potato Famine, and it becomes clear as day why so many people crossed the Atlantic when they did. We look at the devastation of the World Wars and it is still just as evident why so many families took ships over: in order to have a new start and to sail away from hurtful memories of the past. Regarding the families of this paper, “in the 1840s and 1850s farm families from the poorest agricultural areas started to emigrate” and “were followed by subsequent waves in the late 1860s and early 1870s and again in the 1880s and 1890s”⁴, nailing the dates when the Andersons—my family’s original name—took a ship overseas and renamed themselves the Lundholms.

Algot Theodore Anderson was born March 21, 1875 in Svarttorp Parish, Jönköping, an area in Småland, Sweden. Algot’s older brothers, Charley and August, were touched by the so-called “America-fever” and quickly the rest of the family followed. The family decided to adopt a different last name that the brothers had taken on their arrival to the New World. My great-grandfather explains some of this but doesn’t truly answer the question as to why the name Lundholm had appealed to them:

One change was made almost as soon as the family had arrived in America. Up to this time they were known as the ANDERSON family. From now on they became the LUNDHOLM family, which name the two sons had taken when they had first arrived in

³ Barton, H. Arnold. *A folk divided : homeland Swedes and Swedish Americans, 1840-1940* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994), 37.

⁴ Ingwersen, Faith, et al. *Nordic Immigration to North America* (NCCP, Dept. of Scandinavian Studies, University of Wisconsin, 2002), 23-24.

America. There were so many ANDERSONS there. How they happened to chose LUNDHOLM, we do not know⁵.

My great-grandfather came from a family of farmers, much like the Nilssons in *The Emigrants*, so my writing of the two families, my real life family and the fictional one, line up rather well. While Karl Oskar was a young adult with children when he moved across the Atlantic and my great grandfather was only an eight year old boy, their experiences are nonetheless equivocal. Algot speaks at length about his parents and lovingly so. I do hope he loved them as much as he appeared to, and indeed, it seems that his calling as a Lutheran pastor stemmed from the instillment of Christianity of his father and mother. Algot speaks proudly of their home devoted to the Lord: “They took Him with them into their new home. They worked and prayed together, and they prospered. They had a family altar in their home, and the Church was their spiritual home where they worshipped regularly”⁶. My great-grandfather directly attributes this pious upbringing as a foundation for his future life as a pastor: “Growing up in that kind of home and under the care of that kind of parents naturally left its mark on the children, and something went with them into their homes and family life as a valuable heritage and gift of God”⁷. Karl Oskar lived his life similarly. While he questions God during the terrible drought and loss of the hay, Kristina quickly shames him back to his piety after the burning of the meadow barn, warning Karl that the fire “was the punishment” and “God allows no mockery”⁸. Karl Oskar’s reaction is

⁵ Lundholm, Algot Theodore. “Autobiography of Algot Theodore Lundholm” (Second ed. Minneapolis, Minnesota: author’s personal collection, 1963), VII.

⁶ Lundholm, Algot Theodore. “Autobiography of Algot Theodore Lundholm” (First ed. Minneapolis, Minnesota: author’s personal collection, 1963), 3.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Moberg, Vilhelm. *The Emigrants* (Trans. by Gustaf Lannestock, Borealis Books, 1949), 60.

indicative of his beliefs: “He walked with bent head and looked at the ground. What Kristina had said was true. This time the Lord had answered his prayer—He had taken the rest of the hay”⁹.

My great-grandfather’s devotion to his work, religion, and family are all apparent throughout his writings and the depictions of him through various sources. *The Observer* shows evidence of my great-grandfather’s beliefs and outspokenness in the community. In the September 27, 1923 issue, Algot is quoted while conducting a chapel service on campus: ““The world becomes new to every soul when Jesus Christ enters in to it”¹⁰. He visited the college frequently after he graduated and left for Iowa for a time; most of his children attended the school, and Algot’s son—my grandfather Brynolf—taught in the music department for four decades. Algot made his loyalty and his family’s loyalty to Augustana visibly known. He was also unapologetic in his criticisms of the college as he kept up to date with the campus newspaper—himself being the editor for Lutheran magazine, *Augustana*, for many years—and would frequently write in to voice his opinions: “When the religious situation at the college is touched upon it should be done with the greatest care as that is the very life of the institution to a good many of us, and we would guard that jealously”¹¹. If only he knew the state of religion currently. It appears now that more Catholics go to Augustana College than Lutherans. Indeed, chapel services are no longer required for students to attend. Algot may well be rolling in his grave. However, faith was differently regarded then; it was not as widely criticized, and those who did criticize it were routinely punished or penalized in some form or fashion.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Wickstrom, George, ed. “Advent of Sems Brings Special Chapel Services.” *Observer* (Rock Island, IL), Sept. 27, 1927, <http://edu.arcasearch.com/usilaugcd/>, 6.

¹¹ Nelson, Herman, ed. “Candid Criticism.” *Observer* (Rock Island, IL), Oct. 8, 1925, <http://edu.arcasearch.com/usilaugcd/>, 4.

The Emigrants deals honestly with the life of a struggling Swedish farmer. Karl Oskar curses God and wrestles with his piety; Kristina, his wife, sticks to her religion while being able to question her husband constantly and is a skeptic in everything except Christianity. Their relationship and the way they decide their futures has connected deeply with many Scandinavian immigrants and Scandinavian-Americans ever since Moberg published this first novel in 1949. The series possesses an honesty that is not always apparent in real life documents. True sentiments and issues were more easily bottled up and unsaid, especially in the writings of people like my great grandfather; tight, pious, God-fearing types were hardly honest about their sex lives, marital problems, and familial struggles. Even if these families did not necessarily lie about their memories and experiences, there were certainly factors missing from retellings. While Moberg writes of a fictional family, the Nilssons thoughts are honest and true. In the most fantastical writings, we sometimes find a truth more honest than real life.

In Kristina, we see her wrestle with the fact to not have more children, and in Karl Oskar, we see him override her logic to not have more children simply by arguing that “no man who slept with his wife was built”¹² to withstand such temptations; the insinuation is that God would not have made men so lustful, so he therefore must continue to have marital relations with her, regardless of the fact that he will get her pregnant again—as she had feared and attempted to dissuade him of—and of the fact that they can scarcely afford another child. We see here a problem many marriages were experiencing during the time, but I can hardly imagine my great grandfather discussing anything to do with his own marriage bed. Not that the idea appeals to me, of course, but it is this principle of a tight-lipped family that kept these rather shady, God-shaming coercions that took place in the marriage bed to be secret and as such, a lack of

¹²Moberg, Vilhelm. *The Emigrants* (Trans. by Gustaf Lannestock, Borealis Books, 1949), 18.

discussion was the result. And in that vein, a lack of understanding and comprehension on what was right to do and what was not right to force one's own wife to undergo, all under the pretense of appeasing God. That is the sort of truth that Moberg brought to light and thus, these discussions could reach fruition.

When reading my great grandfather's autobiography, there is so much unsaid in his words that I wish was there. I am missing the frank nature of *The Emigrants*, but I cannot expect the same amount of truthfulness as a fictional novel. His story is important, both for a unique, Scandinavian perspective but also for my own personal reasons. It plots out the factual, vital details of the Lundholm family, and his writing adds a dimension to my family's history. When examining past, we are able to pick apart aspects of our ancestors' lives; different as they are, certain revelations come hurtling forth and sometimes repeat themselves in our current lives. Understanding one's past aids the potential actions of one's future. My great grandfather was not a perfect person. Truthfully, his flaws shine out clearly to me in his writing, regardless of this idyllic picture that he paints his life to be. His love for the distant homeland of Sweden rings truly and bittersweet. He praises his wife Lydia to the high heavens, certainly this much is true. And his love for his family is clear as day. The devastation he felt for the death of my great uncle Einar, who "passed away so suddenly and unexpected in the very prime of his life,"¹³ reverberates throughout the last few lines of his autobiography. The heart of my ancestor is there, absolutely. And yet, I have to wonder what has been left out. Indeed, one has to wonder how much has been left out of so many historical accounts of ancestors; their accounts shaped our present and our future. Thankfully now, when we look back at these tellings, we know to question them, deeply, and have learned to analyze these findings with a critical perspective.

¹³ Lundholm, Algot Theodore. "Autobiography of Algot Theodore Lundholm" (First ed. Minneapolis, Minnesota: author's personal collection, 1963), 11.

Howard Zinn's *The People's History of the United States* is a prime example of this questioning nature many of us have developed. The history we have been told as elementary children and by our forefathers is not above intense scrutiny. And it never will be again.

How much of what my great grandfather writes is truthful? Much of the factual information has been corroborated by my relatives and by my own research. *The Augustana Ministerium 1850-1962*'s short biography of A.T. Lundholm lines up with my great grandfather's locations and date¹⁴. Algot had four children, he was born on March 21, 1875 in Näshult, Småland, and the dates when he received his degrees are all correct: he graduated from Gustavus Adolphus College (or Academy, as it was known then) in the fall of 1899, and he obtained his Bachelor's of Divinity from the Augustana Seminary in 1902¹⁵. So, the facts lineup, which is definitely helpful for accuracy and placing the right people in the right locations during this time span. But, again, I have to wonder how much of the emotions and feelings ring true in his retelling. When speaking with my relatives on the matter, Algot's recollections of a mostly pristine lifestyle are not as divinely glorious and profoundly pious as he paints them. He wrote lots of fluffy, biblical language about the love he held for his wife, but according to my relatives, my great-grandfather was not always so kind and respectful. An aspect unsurprisingly left out of the autobiographies was that she was an illegitimate daughter, born out of wedlock. Purportedly, Algot teased Lydia cruelly about this part of her background, thinking it was funny to poke and prod at something she had no control over. Again, a historical viewpoint is needed here.

Nowadays, it is a mostly accepted fact that many humans are born out of an unmarried union. In

¹⁴ Bergendoff, Conrad. *The Augustana Ministerium: A Study of the Careers and of the 2,504 Pastors of the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Synod/Church, 1850-1962*. (Rock Island, Illinois: Augustana Historical Society, 1980), 68.

¹⁵ Lundholm, Algot Theodore. "Autobiography of Algot Theodore Lundholm" (First ed. Minneapolis, Minnesota: author's personal collection, 1963), 1.

fact, many people have dropped the whole marriage idea altogether, or at least, find that they want to tie the knot *after* they've had children. One can imagine grandparents and great grandparents quaking in their boots at such a thought—my own included. The fact about my great-grandmother's illegitimacy are possible reasons why Algot wrote two autobiographies—there may be more versions somewhere in my relatives' basements—because he was battling with a decision to address this “unseemly” aspect of his wife's otherwise spotless life. When explaining the reason for two autobiographies, my aunt Martha said that “there are discrepancies among the versions, mostly having to do with facts and dates concerning Lydia's parents...matters were awkward in that marriage, and I think A. T. wanted to smooth over what he put into print about that side of the family”¹⁶.

To speculate on my great grandfather's unspoken sentiments as well as my great grandmother Lydia's life is also worthwhile. My aunt tells me there is a great amount of family material in my uncle's basement in St. Cloud, Minnesota. Perhaps there exists accounts of Lydia Lundholm as well as my other female ancestors during that time period. It would greatly enrich this research and provide my family with a deeper connection to our past. I am well aware that my great grandfather would be gobsmacked that I am independent, unmarried, and entirely disconnected from religion while possessing no intentions of having children in the near future. Just reading the two volumes of *Women of the Bible* as well as his autobiography is indicative of his nature. From a historical perspective, this is entirely understandable. If one was not part of the church and did not stick to the picture perfect Christian family dynamic, that person was ostracized, penalized, and ridiculed by society.

¹⁶ Martha Jansson, e-mail message to author, January 15, 2018.

Both Algot's and Karl Oskar's families were religious and raised so. When they moved to the Americas, would they have been shocked at the falling out of religion that Sweden experienced since they left? It's hardly what it once was regarding Christianity, specifically the Lutheran faith. My great-grandfather writes about the Woman Ideal in his two volumes of *Women of the Bible*, speaking of the pure, perfect woman of God. He makes a bold statement for his time: the "mother is second only to that of God"¹⁷. His autobiography appears to paint his mother and wife as this Woman Ideal he writes comprehensively on. Perhaps Algot was right and Great Grandmother Lydia was the most saintly of humans. But, as countless historical accounts have revealed, nothing is as it seems at the outset. As I've remarked on previously, Algot did not necessarily treat his wife with as much respect as his writings seem to infer. It is a shame that my findings did not unearth any writings of Lydia, if any exist. Perhaps there are letters she wrote stored away in Minnesota to be found in ten years, but I imagine her honest opinions—and that is assuming she was honest to herself about her husband and his supposedly wonderful treatment of her—would not have gotten into a letter. She was apparently the loyal, subservient Lutheran housewife. God-fearing and obedient, I imagine Lydia would have had the dinner ready at exactly the right time, when Algot wished, and never issued a word of complaint. Algot was a firm believer that "Home-making is the greatest science in the world"¹⁸. Living happily with a husband of such notions cannot have to lead to much argument from her end. I would love to be wrong on that count, but until I find any circumstantial evidence of her thoughts and revelations about the world, I can never know her own lived experience. At least, in *The Emigrants*, we have Kristina's perspective. Kristina, while a loyal, supportive wife, has her flaws

¹⁷ Lundholm, Algot Theodore. *Women of the Bible* (Second ed., I-II. Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1923), 13.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

just as Karl Oskar does. Admittedly, Algot inserts some progressive thoughts onto this conservative Lutheran mentality. Of the Ideal Woman, he speaks thusly: “She has in her hands the shaping of life itself, and she gives it direction not for time only but for eternity as well. It is for her to keep the deeper life-springs sweet and free from bitterness. She wields a power as wife and mother which ought to make her tremble, because she lays foundations on which life-structures are to rest, stand, or fall”¹⁹.

Critical as I am of my great grandfather’s old-fashioned ideals, they were not old-fashioned ideals during that time period. My great grandparents’ marriage was a stereotypical, white couple arrangement. So, it was unexpected to read Algot’s words when describing the Ideal Woman because his writings were progressive for the time. He truly honors his wife and mother by using phrases such as “shaping life itself” and “eternity.” Those words aren’t used lightly. Sure, my great-grandfather’s writing may be fluffy and sometimes too flowery, encouraging the reader to question whether his words are well and truly genuine. However, the sentiment still stands. It still surprised me that Algot wrote this phrase: “It is not that woman lacks the ability to measure her powers with the man. Physically she is, of course, at a disadvantage; but mentally and spiritually she is his equal”²⁰. The very idea that he would compare a woman to a man and call her his equal is fascinating to me. It seems preposterous within the same book that calls home-making the world’s greatest science. Admittedly, his heart is in the right place here. Raising a family is important, and the fact that the woman was foisted with all that responsibility is something she should be honored for, even if she did not have a choice in the matter. In essence, the ideals of my great-grandfather, while at times irritating and problematic, are also complex and full of progressive ideas for the time.

¹⁹ Ibid., 17-18.

²⁰ Ibid., 17.

What can the aged ideals of the past teach current generations? My great-grandfather was not a perfect man, and as much as he would like his descendants to believe, the life of the first Lundholms that stepped onto American soil were not as saintly clean as he would have had us all believe. Yet, when comparing his life to that of the fictional Nilssons, so much can be learned from both families, real and fictional. When Scandinavians came over in the Great Migration, the world they imagined may not have been as picture perfect as the golden wheat field Karl Oskar reads about, but it was still a foundation for a new beginning. Leaving the homeland and learning to live with the New World was as difficult a decision as any. It was a varied, complex experience for these people, and the lives they led in America was just as complex. Algot may not have been as truthful as I would have liked in his writings, and I am equally as dissatisfied with the lack of written female voices in the Lundholm history. Still, I live in hope of uncovering documents, and I am appreciative that I have Algot's telling of my family's past. I am lucky to have a backstory, that I have faces to add to my family name, and letters and autobiographies to peruse for years to come. Reading about the lives of Scandinavian Americans has enhanced the way I regard my past and will affect the way I utilize my future. Only in the revelations of the past can we well and truly step forward into the future, living in the footsteps of all those who came before us.

Bibliography

Barton, H. Arnold. *A folk divided : homeland Swedes and Swedish Americans, 1840-1940.*

Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994.

Professor Barton outlines the trials and societal rifts created by the great migration of Swedes traveling to the New World during a one hundred year period. He documents the love-hate relationship between the people that stayed behind in the homeland and the families that left.

Bergendoff, Conrad. *The Augustana Ministerium: A Study of the Careers and of the 2,504*

Pastors of the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Synod/Church, 1850-1962. Rock Island, Illinois: Augustana Historical Society, 1980.

President Bergendoff, Augustana College's 5th president from 1935 to 1962, compiled an exhaustive list of the Augustana Synod during the time period 1850-1962 and summarized their lives and careers in abbreviated paragraphs. My great-grandfather was included in this list since Algot had made many contributions to the ELCA in his lifetime and had held many prominent positions in the Augustana Lutheran community; the Augustana Seminary awarded Algot an honorary doctorate in 1924.

Ingwersen, Faith, et al. *Nordic Immigration to North America.* NCCP, Dept. of Scandinavian

Studies, University of Wisconsin, 2002.

Similar to Barton's *A Folk Divided*, this work was a necessary backdrop for this essay as it details the history of migration for all of the Scandinavian countries and their populations. Within my research, it was important to have a mixture of broad, generalized history while being able to narrow in on my great-grandfather's life and create connections between the global and personal scopes.

Lundholm, Algot Theodore. "Autobiography of Algot Theodore Lundholm." First ed.

Minneapolis, Minnesota: author's personal collection, 1963.

I was able to draw from my great-grandfather's own writings in this essay. I am incredibly lucky to have had these resources at my disposal, owing mostly to the help of my aunt Martha Jansson, who lives in Sweden and has done in depth research on our family's history.

Lundholm, Algot Theodore. "Autobiography of Algot Theodore Lundholm." Second ed.

Minneapolis, Minnesota: author's personal collection, 1963.

This was the second edition of my great-grandfather's autobiography. The second edition is shorter and spread out Algot's history into a few different sections. However, there were no major changes made to the original.

Lundholm, Algot Theodore. *Women of the Bible*. Second ed., I-II. Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1923.

My great-grandfather published this two volume work through the Augustana Book Concern, a building that all Augustana students now know as Sorenson Hall. Before the college acquired it in 1963, the Augustana Synod published many biblical works through the printing press. While *Women of the Bible* is a direct tie to the Augustana community and important to the nature of this paper, this biblical work was also vital in understanding Algot's thought processes and his appreciation for the Women's Missionary Society of the Augustana Synod.

Moberg, Vilhelm. *The Emigrants*. Trans. by Gustaf Lannestock. St. Paul, Minnesota: Borealis Books, 1995.

Much of this research is based on historical facts and writings. However, it was vital to also include a fictional work within this paper. While the Nilssons may never have existed, theirs is a transatlantic experience that connected almost universally with Scandinavians immigrated across the ocean and starting a new life in America.

Fictionalized experiences can be just as illuminating as historical accounts.

Nelson, Herman, ed. "Candid Criticism." *Observer* (Rock Island, IL), Oct. 8, 1925,

<http://edu.arcasearch.com/usilaugcd/>.

Even after my great-grandfather graduated from the Augustana Seminary, he was still very much involved within that community. This entry was an excerpt from when Algot wrote to *The Observer*, voicing his concerns about the growing lack of devotion to the Lutheran faith on campus. This action exemplified his character and his devotion to his beliefs.

Wickstrom, George, ed. "Advent of Sems Brings Special Chapel Services." *Observer* (Rock Island, IL), Sept. 27, 1927, <http://edu.arcasearch.com/usilaugcd/>.

Similar to the citation above, this excerpt from *The Observer* personified the dedication of my great-grandfather to the college. In this piece, he is noted as having come to conduct one of the chapel services, and a quote is directed pulled from his sermon.