

1998

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Baer, Elizabeth (1998) "Walls: Talk at Gustavus Adolphus College," *Intersections*: Vol. 1998: No. 5, Article 7.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/intersections/vol1998/iss5/7>

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research the last few years to discover things that we've forgotten. And we find in these early beginnings, something that has given us the inspiration for all the years that have followed. I said Augustana seemed to us large even in 1912 and now we're over 2000 students, we're part of a global educational world. It should give us some sense of our own importance in the task that we're having to do with students.

And how can anyone who spent his life with students regret that kind of career? To be able to see this younger

generation . . . and feel that we have somehow connected with them. You'll find our graduates all over the world. Pick up the alumni directory and you'll find them in practically every part of the world . . . many of them in high positions, even university presidents. So, it's not a small school, and it's not a small world. And to be able to connect our world with the world as a whole--that gives a liberal arts view. And to me that's been the great advantage of spending the years here--that our view has taken us to the ends of the earth.

Walls: A Chapel Talk at Gustavus Adolphus College

September 11, 1997

Elizabeth Baer

(Joshua 6:1-21) Now Jericho was shut up inside and out because of the Israelites; no one came out and no one went in. {2} The LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have handed Jericho over to you, along with its king and soldiers. {3} You shall march around the city, all the warriors circling the city once. Thus you shall do for six days, {4} with seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, the priests blowing the trumpets. {5} When they make a long blast with the ram's horn, as soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and all the people shall charge straight ahead." {6} So Joshua son of Nun summoned the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant, and have seven

ark of the LORD." {7} To the people he said, "Go forward priests carry seven trumpets of rams' horns in front of the and march around the city; have the armed men pass on before the ark of the LORD." {8} As Joshua had commanded the people, the seven priests carrying the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the LORD went forward, of the LORD passed on, blowing the trumpets continually. blowing the trumpets, with the ark of the covenant of the LORD following them. {9} And the armed men went before the priests who blew the trumpets; the rear guard came after the ark, while the trumpets blew continually. {10} To the people Joshua gave this command: "You shall not shout or let your voice be heard, nor shall you utter a word, until the day I tell you to shout. Then you shall shout." {11} So the ark of the LORD went around the city, circling it once; and they came into the camp, and spent the night in the camp. {12} Then Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the LORD. {13} The seven priests carrying the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark The armed men went before them, and the rear guard came after the ark of the LORD, while the trumpets blew continually. {14} On the second day they marched around the city once and then returned to the camp. They did this for six days. {15} On the seventh day they rose early, at dawn, and marched around the city in the same manner seven times. It was only on that day that they marched around the city seven times. {16} And at the seventh time, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the

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people, "Shout! For the LORD has given you the city. {17} The city and all that is in it shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall live because she hid the messengers we sent. {18} As for you, keep away from the things devoted to destruction, so as not to covet and take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel an object for destruction, bringing trouble upon it. {19} But all silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, are sacred to the LORD; they shall go into the treasury of the LORD." {20} So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown. As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpets, they raised a great shout, and the wall fell down flat; so the people charged straight ahead into the city and captured it. {21} Then they devoted to destruction by the edge of the sword all in the city, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys.

Some years, I have selected a topic for my autumn chapel homily and then chosen the Biblical verse accordingly--years when I have spoken on travel to Israel, learning Japanese, and the splendor of the season of summer.

This year, I decided to accept Chaplain Elvee's assignment. Encountering him on campus a few weeks ago, I asked him why he'd chosen this passage about soldiers engaging in battle as a text for the Dean upon the occasion of the opening of school. He laughed his easy laugh and mumbled something about the Dean blowing the horn.

No offense to you musicians, but I'd been ruminating on the *walls*, not the horns, as I read and reread the passage. I thought first of one of my favorite Robert Frost poems, "Mending Walls." You remember this poem--the narrator's neighbor believes that "Good fences make good neighbors" and the narrator questions:

"Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offense.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down."

I thought, too, of the Holocaust, an area of study in which I both teach and do research. There were the walls around ghettos in which Jews were confined. One book, which presents an autobiographical account of involvement in the Jewish resistance movement at the Warsaw ghetto is entitled On Both Sides of the Wall. It is written by Vladka Meed, a woman I had the privilege to study with in 1994. Another book about the period, simply entitled Walls, is an account by a righteous gentile, Margaret Zassenhaus, whom I knew

while living in Maryland, who outwitted the Gestapo on many occasions. Both of these women would be inclined, I believe, to agree with Robert Frost: "something there is that doesn't love a wall."

Of course, in reading the passage about Jericho, I also thought of Berlin and its Wall, a wall inside instead of surrounding the city. The Berlin Wall was a real barrier that constituted part of the metaphorical Iron Curtain, such a central feature of the mental landscape of my childhood. The Berlin Wall came down in a triumphant moment in 1989 and is now more or less eradicated, creating all kinds of challenges for that city. Something there was that didn't love that wall either.

I'd been wondering where to take the homily from there when, during the new faculty orientation last week, a second year faculty member gave new faculty some advice which helped me. In providing tips on how to survive the first year at Gustavus, he urged his colleagues to go to chapel. He confessed that he'd gone out of curiosity rather than a particular religious conviction and he'd been surprised at how much he learned from and about this community by listening to homilies.

And that reminded me of something I have long reflected upon: the ways in which homilies at Gustavus are often acts of self-disclosure. Faculty, students, and staff members speak autobiographically, establishing a level of intimacy in this discourse different from any other discourse on campus. I have come to believe that this is one of the well-springs of community on our campus. This discourse is, perforce, different from those in classrooms, committee meetings, the Canteen, dorm rooms, and different, too, from electronic communications and scholarly presentations.

The discourse is also intertextual. It is not uncommon, as the year unwinds, for one homilist to refer back to what previous homilists have said. In that way, we establish connections with one another that are very powerful and very personal. We demonstrate that we listen, we reflect, we react to what our colleagues say from this pulpit. In such intertextuality, we acknowledge influence and caring and memory, three of the mainstays of working and living together.

Now, I grant you that this homily is becoming more about literary criticism and that literary criticism is becoming more autobiographical. When I embarked on the writing of my dissertation in 1976, I was forbidden to include the word "I" anywhere in the 100+ page text except under the acknowledgments section. This taboo has gradually changed

from observation in the first person being ventured tentatively by literary scholars to such personal observations being validated and then being valorized. I wonder if homilies at Gustavus have taken a similar course? Or if they have always tended to be an opportunity for members of this community to speak from the heart, from personal experience, from personal beliefs. Maybe someone with a longer history here than I will respond to this query in a future homily.

Having gone this far, I might as well admit that this is becoming what the lit crit bunch would call a metahomily, that is, a homily about homilies. So I'll go a step further, and quote from Chaplain Elvee's invitation--or some might say--admonition--to the community about chapel. Faculty received this in our mailboxes last week.

He says. "[Chapel] is a time for the College to meet together as a community, to celebrate the simple fact that we have collegial concerns for the higher life. The chapel mediates between classroom, athletic field and the larger society. In it we do a bit of intellectual and cultural celebrating. We also express our common (and sometimes not so common) moral, aesthetic and religious concerns. . . ." He gives us quite broad permission here to do as we will.

So, since I've claimed that homilies are often autobiographical and intertextual, here goes. One of my experiences in giving these homilies has been empowerment. It's not something named in Elvee's description, but I don't think he'd say it's excluded either. As many of you know, I was raised in the Roman Catholic tradition. At that time, girls could not become altar boys, nor were women EVER allowed to speak from the pulpit. The first homily I gave at Gustavus in 1992 was an amazing experience. Although I'd given literally hundreds of lectures from podiums in big lecture halls, from behind tables in storefront libraries in small towns in Vermont, in smoky conference rooms, etc etc., I had never been invited to speak aloud in a church. It makes me feel very differently about spirituality to have had the experience of hearing women's voices here.

Intertextuality. Have you noticed that I complained about my verse assignment at the beginning of the homily and that President Steuer did so yesterday? Yes, this is one of those homily tropes, almost a staple. We get to chide Elvee in public!

Getting back to Joshua and his walls. . . what does all this about discourses and intertextuality and autobiography and metahomilies and tropes have to do with Joshua fit the battle of Jericho? I like to think of the Chapel discourse as a superb opportunity to help us understand one another, to break down the walls of misunderstandings and stereotypes that differences sometimes build. There is an ecumenism here which I believe is one reason our chapel tradition has stayed alive, while so many others have withered. We genuinely talk with one another in this place. When one speaks personally, intimately, from the heart, it is not possible for the audience to deny that person his or her experience. Instead, we are invited to enter it, to see from a new angle.

Oh, all right. Maybe I am blowing that horn after all. Elvee is probably chortling by now. It is a call to all of you to be here, and be part of this conversation.

"There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him
He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'"

By the end of the poem, the narrator has not seduced his neighbor to rethink this adage. I hope the year ahead will be an opportunity for you to rethink assumptions, pieties, stereotypes, and that you'll do some of that rethinking right here. LET'S MAKE THOSE WALLS COME TUMBLING DOWN.

Authors Note:

Given the F3 tornado which hit our campus full force on March 29, this final sentence now seems eerily prescient. Many walls indeed came tumbling down, as well as roofs, 80% of our windows and 90% of our trees. But the Chapel walls, I am happy to report, stood firm, and the graceful Chapel spire that was lost will be replaced this summer. Most amazing was the survival of the eternal flame in the red glass lantern suspended from the Chapel ceiling. When it was discovered still burning, by Associate Chaplain Brian Johnson, after the 230 mph winds had torn through the campus, it became a symbol of hope for us all.