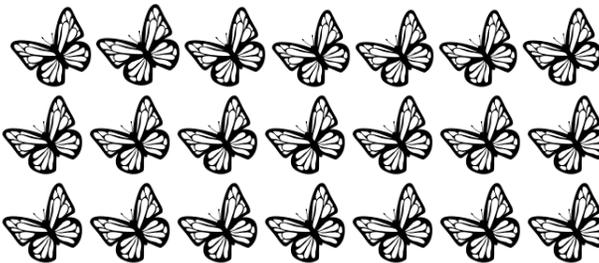
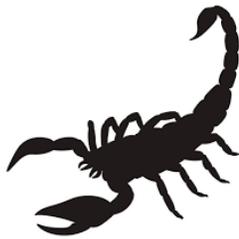


AColyte

November 2022 (the first One)
A Journal of Faith, Doubt, and Other Things
at Austin College



Snakes, Scorpions,
21 Butterflies,
and Seven Values

AColyte

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

Rev. John Williams, Ph.D., Editor

900 N. Grand Ave.

Suite 61647

Sherman, TX 75090

903.813.2220

jwilliams@austincollege.edu

+++++

WHAT IS THE *AColyte* AND WHY DO I HAVE ONE?

Welcome to the first edition of the *AColyte* for the 2022-23 school year.

This journal is intended to provide a forum for the Austin College community to discuss theological issues and keep up with what's going on in our various Religious Life programs.

We operate with a fairly broad definition of theology around here. As far as we're concerned, anybody who spends time thinking about which things matter more than other things is a theologian.

That probably even includes you.

The use of the term "AColyte" for our title is based on our hope that, like an acolyte who lights candles in a worship service, we can also be "bringers of light," or "bringers of flame," or instruments to help "lighten things up." If nothing else, we can promise to provide ample opportunities to practice the virtues of patience and forgiveness.

Feel free to reply if you have questions or comments or corrections.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN...

Lake Tahoe, Nevada
Behind a Guitar (My Happy Place)
Summer 2022

*Don't worry.
I'll retire when they pull my guitar from my cold dead hands!*

--Steven Van Zandt

Responding to rumors that he is retiring
from Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band

I don't know what you did last summer, but I got paid to play guitar at Lake Tahoe.

There's no particular reason that you should care about that, but I think it's a cool thing to get to say.

I was actually out there working for **Rachel Hebert**. She is the daughter of Austin College Philosophy Professor Mark Hebert. Rachel is a Presbyterian minister who serves the church in Williamsburg, Virginia and she does campus ministry at the College of William and Mary.

She's a talented minister and an excellent singer and she currently serves on the Board of UKirk – the national Presbyterian Church campus ministry association.

In her capacity as a UKirk Board member, Rachel was in charge of the Worship services this summer at the UKirk National Gathering at Zephyr Point – a Presbyterian Camp and Conference Center on the south bank of Lake Tahoe.

And she asked me to come play guitar while she led music at the conference.

I even got a little stipend.

So that's how I got paid to play guitar at Lake Tahoe.

I got a gig, baby, I got a gig.
--Hayes Carll

We had 5 or 6 worship services while we were at Zephyr Point – including one on the night of June 15.

That was special because it was the Installation of my friend **Gini Norris-Lane** as the first ever Executive Director of UKirk. Gini is the former Chaplain at Schreiner University in Kerrville (where my daughter graduated and my son is currently a sophomore). We've been friends and colleagues for a long time.

Gini has actually been leading UKirk for a couple years but – due to COVID – we hadn't been able to get together in person to formally install her until our gathering this summer.

So we were all excited to get to do that in Nevada on June 15.

I was proud and excited to participate in Gini's Installation.

Like Rachel, Gini is also a gifted minister. She's a part-time Stated Supply pastor for a little church in the Hill Country, and she's the perfect person for this new part time, remote UKirk Executive Director position.

+++++

I also thought about y'all while I was at Lake Tahoe.

While I was at Lake Tahoe with my campus ministry friends, I found myself thinking about a story from the Gosepl of Luke.

Check it out:

*After this the Lord appointed seventy others
and sent them on ahead of him in pairs*

*to every town and place where
he himself intended to go.*

This story is about a community of people like us who have a common mission. We're not all Christians in ROONation, but we've all got work to do.

*He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful,
but the laborers are few;
therefore ask the Lord of the harvest
to send out laborers into his harvest.*

In this story, Jesus sends out seventy people – in pairs – and talks about needing laborers for the harvest.

For centuries, most Christians have assumed that the "harvest" Jesus is referring to is about gathering souls into the Church.

I'm not sure that's the best way for Christians to interpret this passage.

And it's certainly not a helpful way for us to think about "the harvest" here at Austin College.

We're a school, not a church.

We're not in the soul-harvesting business in that sense.

But I think the harvest imagery is appropriate for us if we use it as a way to think about our efforts to help each other identify, develop, and share our particular gifts.

I think we're gift harvesters.

In the broadest terms, much of what all of us who draw a paycheck here do is help students identify, develop, and share their particular gifts.

We think we have also been called together and sent into the world – together – to use our gifts to transform the world.

This story from Luke is about Jesus calling and empowering communities.

*Go on your way.
See, I am sending you out like lambs
into the midst of wolves.
4Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals;
and greet no one on the road.
5Whatever house you enter, first say,
'Peace to this house!'
6And if anyone is there who shares in peace,
your peace will rest on that person;
but if not, it will return to you.
7Remain in the same house,
eating and drinking whatever they provide,
for the laborer deserves to be paid.
Do not move about from house to house.
8Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you,
eat what is set before you;
9cure the sick who are there, and say to them,
'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'
10But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you,
go out into its streets and say,
11'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet,
we wipe off in protest against you.
Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.'*

As he sends them out into the harvest, Jesus tells the seventy a bunch of things that amount to instructions to

- work hard,
- be nice,
- be useful,
- don't get discouraged if some of it's hard, and
- let it go if you have a bad experience.

That's certainly good advice for all of us:
do the work
don't give up.

+++++

Now watch what happens in verse 17:

*The seventy returned with joy, saying,
"Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!"
He said to them,
"I watched Satan fall from heaven
like a flash of lightning.
See, I have given you authority
to tread on snakes and scorpions,
and over all the power of the enemy;
and nothing will hurt you.*

The Seventy return to Jesus "with joy" in verse 17 because they realize that – when they go out to serve the world together – they are able to ease the fear and pain of others.

Put away the Halloween images of demons and Satan. These verses have nothing to do with little angry red men with horns and pitchforks.

In the pre-scientific world in which these were written, the word "demon" referred to any force that could not be seen but that certainly had identifiable consequences for people.

The things you and I call germs and viruses would have been referred to as demons in the world of the Bible.

And the word "Satan" is the Hebrew word for "Adversary."

I think Verse 19 shows us what Jesus means when he hears the Seventy talk about submitting demons and talks to them about Satan falling.

In that verse, Jesus says

*See, I have given you authority
to tread on snakes and scorpions,
and over all the power of the enemy;
and nothing will hurt you.*

Snakes scare people.

Scorpions hurt people.

To be given authority to tread on snakes and scorpions is to be called and empowered to contend against things in the world that scare or hurt others.

+++++

Unfortunately, last summer we didn't have to look far to see snakes and scorpions.

- School shootings and other violence
- Efforts to limit the bodily autonomy of women and transgender persons
- Disease
- Widespread and repeated Dishonesty and Deception by public figures
- Despair in the face of so much pain and fear and uncertainty.

No doubt it. The Snakes and Scorpions are rampant.

But I love the imagery of Luke 10:19.

*See, I have given you authority
to tread on snakes and scorpions*

As I've said before in the *AColyte*, I think "treading – or maybe hopping – on snakes and scorpions" is a good way to think about what we do here at Austin College.

We work hard to contend against the things that scare or hurt our students.

And we invite, encourage, and enable them to do that for the world.

+++++

*Don't give up, you just keep on fighting
Don't give up, you just keep on fighting
Don't give up, you just keep on fighting
For a brighter day.*

--Michael Franti & Spearhead

I want to tell you one more story:

As part of that Service at Lake Tahoe back on June 15, a couple members of the UKirk Board gave Gini a gift to mark her installation.

It was a beautiful white stole with 21 multi-colored butterflies on it.

I told you earlier that, in addition to her half-time remote position as UKirk Executive Director, Gini is also the part-time Stated Supply Pastor at a small Presbyterian in the Texas Hill Country:

First Presbyterian Church of **Uvalde, Texas**.

Those 21 butterflies represented the 19 children and 2 teachers who were shot and killed at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde on May 24 – 22 days before we installed Gini.

That tragedy affected the entire Uvalde community.

It directly touched several of the families in the Presbyterian Church there.

And, of course, it had occupied a great deal of Gini's time, energy, and attention in the days before we gathered at Lake Tahoe.

The conception, creation, and presentation of that particular gift at Gini's installation was stunning.

It was profound.

It was beautiful.

It was a gift that recognized and celebrated the fulness of her ministry.

It was a gift that noted and acknowledged that she and the whole Uvalde community have faced – and continue to face – an almost unbearable reality.

It was a gift that said – and will continue to say whenever she wears that stole – that Gini and the Presbyterians and the other citizens of Uvalde are not alone as they spend this season trying to make their way through the valley of the shadow of death.

Twenty-one butterflies on a field of white.

That stole was a gift that represented defiance and hope in the face of great tragedy.

It was an affirmation of life in the face of death.

It was just right.

It occurred to me at that installation service last Summer that the folks who gave the 21 butterflies stole to my friend Gini were stomping snakes and scorpions like

- Despair
- Grief and
- Isolation.

They did a beautiful, significant, and important thing.

They didn't deny the pain.

But they pointed beyond it.

+++++

And then it occurred to me that the Seven Values listed in the Austin College Mission Statement

- Personal Growth
- Justice
- Service
- Community
- Academic Excellence
- Intellectual and Personal Integrity and
- Community Life

(I can recite those from memory – That's pretty geeky, I know).
can be read as 7 ways that we hop on snakes and scorpions.

One way we value **Personal Growth** is by helping our students recognize the difference between facts and things they just wish were true.

We can value **Justice** by noticing and valuing all our fellow citizens. This includes learning about them, listening to them, and respecting their faith (if that's important to them), their political opinions, and their bodily autonomy.

We value **Community** by working together to hop on snakes and scorpions. That's essentially why we have the Service Station, and First We Serve, and the Great Day of Service.

We promote **Service** by working – and encouraging our students to work – to be sure it's clearly good news for others that we are here being who we are and doing what we do.

THAT'S WHY THE SERVICE STATION HAS ORGANIZED THE GREAT DAY OF SERVICE THIS SATURDAY.

Our commitment to **Academic Excellence** leads us to get better at contending against snakes and scorpions.

We can show the world the value **Intellectual and Personal Integrity** by

- meeting our obligations and commitments,
- keeping our word,
- telling the damn truth, and
- facing the truth even when that's disappointing or difficult for us.

Finally, we can value **Community Life** by noticing and serving our neighbors. By learning about them and from them. And by participating responsibly in civic life. I'm pretty sure that will involve resisting efforts to impede the ability of our neighbors to vote.

Friends, it's no secret that the Snakes and Scorpions are out there.

We can't pretend that isn't true.

We can't wish them away.

But we can join hands – or paws if you want to extend the kangaroo metaphor – and hop on them.

Let's do that.

The world is counting on us.

We got this.

Until Next Time, I remain,
Just Another Cowboy Preacher,
Ready to Stand Shoulder-to-Shoulder With You
To Hop on Snakes and Scorpions,

JOHN WILLIAMS
Chaplain