

# AColyte

Election Day 2022  
A Journal of Faith, Doubt, and Other Things  
at Austin College



Every.  
Living.  
Creature.

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

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## TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN...

Election Day 2022

Still drying out after a week of rain

*...And the rain came down  
Like an angel coming down from above.  
And the rain came down.  
It'll wash you away  
And there ain't never enough.  
--Steve Earle*

*When it all comes down, look for me.  
I'll still be around.  
When it all comes down, look for me.  
--B.B. King*

*Here comes that rainbow again.  
--Walt Wilkins singing a Kris Kristofferson song*

According to Wikipedia:

*Since June 14, 2022,  
[floods](#) in [Pakistan](#) have killed 1,717 people.*

*The floods were caused by heavier than usual [monsoon rains](#) and [melting glaciers](#) that followed a [severe heat wave](#), all of which are linked to [climate change](#). It is the world's [deadliest flood](#) since the [2020 South Asian floods](#) and described as the worst in the country's history. On 25 August, Pakistan declared a [state of emergency](#) because of the flooding. The [government of Pakistan](#) has estimated losses worth US\$40 billion from the flooding.*

I certainly don't want to make light of those tragic circumstances or overlook the significant misery that has unfortunately come in the wake of the floods in Pakistan.

- Thousands of people have been killed or displaced;
- Entire villages have essentially disappeared.

We will work to find ways to help the people of Pakistan and I urge you to do the same. We plan to send a portion of the Offering we collected at the Homecoming Worship Service to our partners at Presbyterian Disaster Resistance to be used for Pakistan Flood Relief.

But in the context of this *AColyte*, I want to invite you to imagine for a moment what it would be like to try to find meaning in those floods if you didn't know about science.

Events like that happened long before humans knew as much as we know now about the causes of major weather events.

Imagine experiencing some kind of life-altering event like that and not knowing why things like that happen.

People have always been smart, and curious.

We have always sought meaning in our lives no matter our circumstances.

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There's a pretty well-known story about a catastrophic flood in the Book of Genesis in the Bible.

Many of us have been familiar with that story for most of our lives.

But today I invite you use your Liberal Arts brains to think about the story of Moses and the Flood and all the animals marching two by two onto the ark.

And before we can usefully think about that flood story in particular, we need to talk about the Book of Genesis in general.

And the best way to talk about the whole Book of Genesis is first to look at Exodus 34:6.

Trust me on this: it's gonna make sense in a minute.

Exodus 34 contains the story about Moses going back up the mountain to get a new copy of the Ten Commandments. In the Book of Exodus, Moses smashes the first copy when he sees the Golden Calf that the Israelites had built to worship while he was gone up Mount Sinai the first time.

That's not all that important for us right now, but I want you to see what God says when Moses gets back up the mountain that second time.

Exodus 34:6 says:

*The Lord passed before [Moses] and proclaimed,  
"I Am, I Am,*

[most English Bible translations say "the Lord, the Lord"  
but God is using the Divine name—"Yahweh" in this verse.  
"I Am" is a better translation]

So God says:

*"I Am, I Am,  
a God merciful and gracious,*

*slow to anger,  
and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.*

That's a hugely important verse in the Old Testament. There are six other passages in the Hebrew Scriptures that use that same language to describe God:

Gracious  
Merciful  
Slow to anger  
Abounding in steadfast love.

Biblical scholars think that's the oldest language in the entire Bible. It's like a creed, a sort of definition of who God is. It was part of the Hebrew oral tradition before any of the texts in our Bible were even written down. From as far back as we can know, the Hebrews understood themselves to be uniquely related to a gracious, merciful, patient, and steadfastly loving God.

It's important to understand that before we turn our attention to the Book of Genesis.

Genesis was written in a community of people who worshipped and sought to serve their gracious, merciful, patient, and steadfastly loving God.

But the world as they encountered it raised some questions for them.

Where did all this come from?

Where did *we* come from?

If God is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love – which we believe--

Why do people consistently disappoint and betray each other?

Why are we scared of snakes?

Why is childbirth so painful?

Why is it so hard for us to get enough food?

And,

What's the deal with that flood that destroyed everything a few generations ago?

The Book of Genesis can be helpfully and appropriately read as an attempt by pre-scientific people who knew about God – and knew about literature and metaphors – to make sense of their imperfect world without abandoning their faith in their gracious, merciful, patient, and loving God.

We need to remember that when we read the story of Noah and the Flood.

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Back in the late '70s, one of the first songs I ever learned to play on guitar was "The Road and the Sky" by Jackson Browne.

<https://youtu.be/bN2BLHqkgSc>

It's a great song, from his *Late for the Sky* album.

The last verse of that song contains a line that I've used and written about in a lot of different contexts throughout my career.

*Can you see those dark clouds gathering up ahead?  
They're gonna wash this planet clean, like the Bible said  
You can hold on steady and try to be ready  
But everybody's gonna get wet  
Don't think it won't happen  
Just because it won't happen yet.*

I've gotten a lot of good use out of that last line.

Several years ago, ACTivators had a t-shirt that showed a lion and a lamb fist-pumping with the words

*Don't think it won't happen  
Just because it hasn't happened yet*

below that image.

It's a cool line.

But it occurred to me this week that ol' Jackson completely misunderstands the meaning of the Flood story in Genesis.

He sings:

*Can you see those dark clouds gathering up ahead?  
They're gonna wash this planet clean, like the Bible says.*

Here's the thing:

After the flood ends, in Genesis 9, God tells Noah:

*"This is the sign of the covenant  
that I make between me and you  
and every living creature that is with you,  
for all future generations:  
I have set my bow in the clouds,  
and it shall be a sign of the covenant  
between me and the earth.  
When I bring clouds over the earth  
and the bow is seen in the clouds,  
I will remember my covenant that is between me and you  
and every living creature of all flesh,  
and the waters shall never again  
become a flood to destroy all flesh.*

*When the bow is in the clouds,  
I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant  
between God and every living creature of all flesh  
that is on the earth.”  
God said to Noah,  
“This is the sign of the covenant that I have established  
between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”*

With all due respect to Jackson Browne, the whole point of the flood story is God’s promise never to do that again.

Mark this, friends. This is important:

**THE ONLY PEOPLE WHO HAVE EVER HEARD, READ, OR TOLD THE STORY OF NOAH AND THE FLOOD ARE PEOPLE WHO HAVE SEEN RAINBOWS.**

- Although lots of us like scary movies – especially at this time of year; and
- Although the story of Noah and the flood and the ark and the animals coming two-by-two is rich and vivid and compelling and familiar; and
- Although – especially so close to the midterm elections--we might occasionally think the world where we woke up this morning is irredeemable and deserves to be destroyed
  - Because it’s such an obvious disappointment to God

Nevertheless, we must remember that the story of Noah and the Flood is not ultimately a story of disappointment and destruction.

It’s a story that promises everlasting divine care for every living creature.

The Rainbow Covenant in Genesis 9 is the first Covenant mentioned in the Bible. And, according to Genesis 9:12, God’s first Covenant is with every living creature – not just the ones who

- Act a certain way, or
- Are part of a certain group, or

- Live a certain way, or
- Worship a certain way, or
- Love a certain way.

God's Rainbow Promise is for all of us – however we define “us” – and it's also for all of them – however we define “them.”

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I make my living helping the entire Austin College community think about what matters to us and what we hope will continue to matter to our students and alumni.

Next year will be the 175<sup>th</sup> year of Austin College.

We started out in 1849 as a place for white men (like me) to learn how to be Presbyterian ministers.

In the last 174 years, our picture of who Austin College is for has gotten bigger and bigger and bigger.

We do what we do for more people than we used to.

Austin College grew from the soil of the Presbyterian Church.

We've always taken the Bible seriously in our life together.

And – *because* of our Presbyterian Heritage, and *because* we take the Bible seriously – we have learned through the years to make serious efforts to serve every living creature.

That means welcoming and engaging and accompanying all sorts of students from all sorts of backgrounds.

It means encouraging all students to use their significant and particular gifts to serve every living creature.

This sentimental Chaplain thinks God's rainbow promise to care for every living creature gets fulfilled on this campus every day.

That's essentially why so many of us got up early last Saturday morning and spread out all over Texoma to participate in the Great Day of Service.

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Every year, our Homecoming Worship Service includes the "Necrology." That's a time every year where we pause to remember and give thanks for all the members of Roo Nation who have died in the last year.

We did that in Wynne Chapel last Sunday morning.

And when we did it, we were remembering AC alums who were called and invited through Austin College to care for and serve some of God's living creatures.

Think about those people and this place the next time you see a rainbow.

And always be grateful that there were kangaroos on the ark.

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It's Election Day.

Some of us are going to be thrilled by what happens today.

Others will be discouraged, disillusioned, and disappointed.

But, no matter what happens, we all need to remember that the things in our lives that were most important last week will be the things that will be most important next week.

And, for us, that will mean making serious, intentional, loving, and courageous efforts to care for every living creature.

Every.

Living.

Creature.

That's a tall order.

But what else can we do?

Until Next time, I remain,  
Just Another Cowboy Preacher,  
Taking Deep Breaths and Looking for Rainbows,

JOHN WILLIAMS  
Chaplain

P.S. —

This Walt Wilkins version of a Kris Kristofferson song is what I'm trying to say:

<https://youtu.be/I4ZC2KwB6mo>

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## **RELIGIOUS LIFE PROGRAM EVENTS THIS WEEK**

### **TUESDAY November 8**

Emilie Williams from Perkins School of Theology at SMU and I will be eating lunch together in the Dining Hall from 11:30-1:00. Come see us if you have questions about ministry or theological education.

### **THURSDAY November 10**

11:00am—Bible Study in the Moseley Room

This week we will read the Book of Jonah and talk about what God thinks about people who are Not Like Us.

11:00am-1:00pm—Rabbi Steven Fisch and Jewish students will be in the President's Dining Room to discuss Judaism.

THURSDAY November 10

*You're invited!*

**RABBI STEVEN  
FISCH VISITS  
AUSTIN COLLEGE**

*November 10th | 11am-1pm  
President's Dining Room  
2nd floor WCC*

*Come get a short intro to Judaism  
and talk with a Reform Rabbi, and  
enjoy kosher boxed lunches! See you  
there!*

*<--- Please RSVP via the QR Code!*



THURSDAY November 10

4:30pm—2022 Cunningham Lecture



CUNNINGHAM LECTURE

How to  
Cultivate  
Diversity  
in Your  
Everyday  
Life

Justin Jones-Fosu is a full-time daddy of 2 high-energy kids and he also recently summited one of the 7 Summits (the tallest mountain on each continent). He also happens to be a highly sought-after business speaker, social entrepreneur, and meaningful work researcher. He is the founder and CEO of Work. Meaningful, where he speaks 50-60 times per year to companies, organizations, and associations in the US and Internationally on meaningful work and diversity/inclusion. He is passionate about helping organizations and individuals take ownership of their mindset, purpose, and performance to achieve amazing results. His latest book *"The Inclusive Mindset: How to cultivate diversity in your everyday life"* challenges the reader to see diversity and inclusion as someone they choose to be rather than something they have to do. He is passionate about turning events into memorable experiences with his humorous and engaging delivery as well as his research-based content!

THURSDAY,  
NOVEMBER  
10<sup>TH</sup>  
4:30PM

NATION THEATRE

SUNDAY November 13

6:00pm—Sunday Night Worship with Communion in  
Majors Chapel

6:00pm—Indian Cultural Association Diwali Dinner and  
Celebration

THE INDIAN CULTURAL  
ASSOCIATION PRESENTS:



# DIWALI

ENJOY DINNER AND ENTERTAINMENT  
FROM OUR OWN CAMPUS TALENT!

COME CELEBRATE DIWALI WITH US!!

| SUNDAY, NOV. 13, 2022 |

6:30-9 PM | CHECK IN: 6 PM

| SID RICHARDSON GYM |

RSVP WITH  
QR CODE

