The scripture today comes from Matthew, chapter 22, verses 34-40.

34 Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. 35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” 37 Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

First, I want to thank everyone for coming to this service today. I truly appreciate your presence here and I pray that you find my words meaningful for you. In the scripture for today, Jesus tells the Pharisees what the greatest commandments are. His first commandment in this passage describes how we should act in our relationship to God. Today, I would like to focus on the next commandment: to “love your neighbor as yourself.” With these words, Jesus instructs us on how to act in our relationship with the world. The commandment is only five words, but it is not an easy task. I would like to share what this commandment means to me: that we should pray for others, act for others, and respect others.

Praying for others sounds easy enough—every time we go to church, we pray for those less fortunate than us, those involved in wars, the sick, and the hungry. When I try to pray on my own, however, too often I get distracted, or just ask God for things I want Him to do for me, like to help me get through another busy day as a student at Augie.
Last semester, while studying abroad in Thailand, I found a way to help me put the focus of prayer where it should be—on others.

Since 95 percent of people in Thailand are Buddhist, I took a class there titled Buddhism and Thai Society. One week, we had to practice Buddhist meditation and keep a journal about our experiences. I admit, meditation was a challenge for me—after a couple minutes, my thoughts would be on other homework I needed to do, upcoming travels, my next delicious Thai meal, or the fact that sweat was dripping down my back even though I was sitting completely still in the 110 degree heat. There are different forms of meditation in Buddhism, however, and while I never progressed very far with the kind where you attempt to clear your mind, another form of meditation really appealed to me, and actually helps me follow Jesus’ commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

This form of meditation is called loving-kindness meditation. The idea behind it is that focusing your thoughts on others will lead to acting for others. The meditation begins by cultivating thoughts of loving-kindness toward yourself. Just as Jesus commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves, loving-kindness meditation starts with the self. You picture yourself—like pretending you’re looking in a mirror—and think, “May you be happy. May your mind be at ease. May your body be at ease. May you be safe.” Next, you focus these good thoughts on close family and friends. You keep repeating the thoughts, moving from people you love to people you have a hard time getting along with. This part of the meditation reminds me of Jesus’ instruction in Matthew chapter 5 to “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.” Finally, you focus on spreading loving-kindness
to your whole community, the whole world. In the chaos of our everyday lives, loving-kindness meditation makes us take our minds off our own schedules and send positive thoughts to those we love, those that get on our nerves, those who we see everyday at Augustana, and those living in other places around the world, people we may never meet.

Loving-kindness meditation can help get us in the right mindset to follow this commandment, but it is just the first step. This commandment requires not only that we think about others, but also that we act on behalf of others. It reminds us that being a Christian requires action in the world. As Jesus tells us later in Matthew, chapter 25, acting for others is how we serve God: when we feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, invite in the stranger, clothe the naked, look after the sick, or visit the prisoner, it is as if we are doing these things for him. It is easy to get caught up in the busy-ness of our own lives, but God calls us to make time to serve others. Serving others doesn’t have to mean saving the world—it can be done in our everyday interactions with others. When we listen to a friend going through a tough time or choose not to spread gossip we hear about someone else, we are following this commandment.

Finally, I believe the commandment to love our neighbor calls us to respect others, regardless of differences in religious beliefs. Jesus did not tell us to love only our Christian neighbors, but all our neighbors. We should act with humility towards other religious traditions, keeping in mind that a loving attitude is humble, not conceited or judgmental. As the apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians chapter 13, love does not boast and is not proud.

Being tolerant of someone from another tradition doesn’t mean you have to agree with everything they believe, but that you respect their beliefs just as you would want
them to respect yours. It means viewing all religions as different but still connected—like Gandhi’s description of the world’s religions as one tree with many branches. I saw a physical representation of this idea while flying back to Sioux Falls after fall break. I sat next to a man on the plane with tattoos all over his body. The word “coexist” was tattooed on his arm, and the letters were made of religious symbols from all different traditions. I wish I could say we proceeded to have an intellectual, eye-opening conversation about religious tolerance, but as the plane took off, he pulled out a deck of cards and started performing magic tricks.

On a different travel experience, however, I experienced what a loving relationship with other religions might look like. During my freshmen year, I went on a spring break trip to India with Dr. Looney. We were there over Easter. Given that the majority of people in India are Hindu, we did not go to a Christian service, but continued our sightseeing, visiting the Ganges River, which is considered holy by Hindus. We watched Indians bathing in the sacred water, and some of us even stepped in the river with them. The river may not have had the same meaning for us, but we didn’t dismiss its significance for them, even as we thought of our family and friends at home celebrating Jesus rising from the dead.

Of course, we don’t have to go to across the world to meet people with different beliefs from us. Even within Christianity, there are many differences in beliefs. The commandment to love your neighbor instructs us to be humble when we meet someone who thinks differently from us. This attitude can lead to a relationship with this person, and the possibility of finding things you have in common, despite your initial judgments about them. In short, acting with respect opens the door to a more peaceful community.
Loving our neighbors is our greatest task in this world. When we pray for others, serve others, and respect others, we are following God’s call. May kindness and compassion grow in all of our hearts as we strive to love our neighbor. Amen.
Welcome/Announcements

Invocation

Opening Prayer

L: Dear God, open our hearts to your commandments. Focus our minds on the needs of others, both near and far. Lead us to love our neighbors as ourselves. Guide us to treat others with respect, even when they are different from us. In your holy name we pray, Amen.

Scripture

Matthew 22:34-40

Carli Ellwein

Message

“Love Your Neighbor”

Hometown: Cannon Falls, MN

Majors: Economics & International Studies

Carli Ellwein

Hymn

“In Christ There is No East or West”

ELW #650

Casey Ortbahn, piano

Prayer (read responsively)

Karaniya Metta Sutta (Sn 1.8):

Loving-Kindness Meditation

L: In gladness and in safety,

C: May all beings be at ease.

L: Whatever living beings there may be;
C: Whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,
L: The great or the mighty,
C: medium, short or small,
L: The seen and the unseen,
C: Those living near and far away,
L: Those born and to-be-born
C: May all beings be at ease!
L: Let none deceive another,
C: Or despise any being in any state.
L: Let none through anger or ill-will,
C: Wish harm upon another.
L: Even as a mother protects with her life,
C: her child, her only child,
L: So with a boundless heart
C: Should one cherish all living beings;
L: Radiating kindness over the entire world,
C: Spreading upwards to the skies, and downwards to the depths;
L: Outwards and unbounded,
C: Freed from hatred and ill-will.

Benediction & Dismissal

L: May all God’s people be happy. May we be well. May we be safe. May we be peaceful and at ease. Now go in peace and serve the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Postlude “Achieved is the Glorious Work”

Franz Joseph Haydn

Trombone Quartet: Jason Roseth, Jeff Burwitz, Ally Wingert, Alexis Preheim

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

WALKING WORSHIP - Monday, November 8: GSC Foucault Pendulum - Rachel Hurley, a chemistry and biology major, will take us into the poetry of science as she reflects on the GSC Foucault Pendulum and the nature of time.

GOING BLUE - “For All Who Are Thirsty”

We are looking for donations for a silent auction which will raise money for building wells in South Dakota and worldwide. If you would like to donate time, a meal, a gift certificate, or anything else (be creative!), please email Dillon DeBoer at djdeboer08@ole.augie.edu. The silent auction (6:30 pm) and concert (7:00 pm) will take place on Thursday, November 18.

WINTER CLOTHING DRIVE - There are several drop boxes around campus (one in the chapel Narthex) to collect new or gently used winter clothing, specifically hats, gloves, scarves, etc. All donations will be given to the Banquet and the Children’s Inn.

CHAPEL SCHEDULE

Sunday (7th) Worship, 11 am - Pr. Paul
Monday (8th) Walking Worship, 10 am - Pendulum in Gilbert Science Center - Rachel Hurley, ‘11
Tuesday (9th) Koinonia, 10 am - Seminary Reps. (Individual appt. available through chapel office)
Wednesday (10th) Veterans Day Worship - Holy Communion, 10 am Pr. Norris Einertson; Collegiate Chorale
Friday (12th) Worship, 10 am - Heidi Dreyer, Sr. Spkr.
MORNING WORSHIP - Friday, November 5, 2010

Welcome/Announcements

Invocation
Opening Prayer  Carli Ellwein
L:  Dear God, open our hearts to your commandments. Focus our minds on the needs of others, both near and far. Lead us to love our neighbors as ourselves. Guide us to treat others with respect, even when they are different from us. In your holy name we pray, Amen.

Scripture  Matthew 22:34-40  Carli Ellwein

Message  “Love Your Neighbor”  Maren Peterson
Hometown: Cannon Falls, MN
Majors: Economics & International Studies

Hymn  “In Christ There is No East or West”  ELW #650
Casey Ortbahn, piano

Prayer (read responsively)  Karaniya Metta Sutta   (Sn 1.8):
Loving-Kindness Meditation

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Benediction & Dismissal
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C:  Thanks be to God.

Postlude  “Achieved is the Glorious Work”  Franz Joseph Haydn
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