
**Homecoming Sunday Chapel
September 24, 2006**



David L. Parkyn, President

Have you ever heard a university president say something like this: “At North Park University we educate the whole person”? I’m quite sure you have. And you don’t have to drill down very far in the North Park web site to find these words:

- At North Park we value personal concern for students and devotion to their development as whole persons.
- We strive to help students see their educational experience as an integrated whole.

These are interesting words. They sound good. And somehow they attract students (or at least they don’t put off students). But what does it mean to educate the whole student? And once educated to be whole, what does it mean to remain whole?

One of the matriarchs of higher education in America over the past century has been a woman by the name of Patricia Cross. Some years ago she became fairly well-known by suggesting that education should involve one’s mind, one’s hands, and one’s social skills. She argued that to be well-educated you needed to excel in one of these and be competent in the other two.

For example, a well-educated person might be recognized by being very adept at relating to people, and also bring to life a pretty good mind and a relatively good ability to do things manually. Or another well-educated person might be described as being exceptionally competent with one’s hands (perhaps as an artist or musician) yet also have a disciplined mind and effective social skills. Cross argued, to be well-educated is to excel in one of these three, and to be competent in the other two.

Of course, not everyone agrees with her. Some argue that well-educated people bring a disciplined and creative mind, and perhaps should be quite competent at engaging dinner conversation, but does being well-educated have much to do with an ability to change a flat tire, program a DVR, use a power saw, or cook a gourmet meal?

So, perhaps we’re not sure what it means to educate the whole person, but I do know we do it at North Park!

In the passage we just read from Psalm 26, especially in the 2nd and 3rd verses, there is another triad which is quite similar to the triad Patricia Cross articulated and which might help us understand this concept. I’m interested in this because educating

the whole person isn't just something we at North Park need to think about, and it isn't just something we need to think about when we are students. Rather, it is something we need to consider through all of our life. What does it mean to educate the whole person? What does it mean to be a whole person?

What does Psalm 26 assert?

Prove me, O Lord; and try me;
test my heart and mind.
For your steadfast love is before my eyes,
and I walk in faithfulness to you.

Listen: “test my heart and mind . . . for I walk in faithfulness to you. There is a triad here, and it is similar to other triads we come to frequently in consideration of the Christian life.

Consider these, for example.

- The first verse of John's first epistle: “We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have . . . touched with our hands.”
- The Christian life is often described in this way:
 - We encounter Christ
 - We live in the Spirit
 - We Journey to the Father
- This parallels what we affirm in the Eucharistic feast:
 - Christ has died
 - Christ is risen
 - Christ will come again.

But, let's go back to Psalm 26: “test my heart and mind . . . for I walk in faithfulness to you. This psalm is a prayer of vindication. The psalmist has been accused of wrong-doing. In response, to assert personal innocence, the psalmist points to the evidence: my heart is right, my mind is right, my walk is right.

The heart is symbolic of the psalmist's faith. Here is a person who has given attention to spiritual formation—to considering questions of belief, to embracing the spiritual disciplines. Here is a person who recognizes the heart as part of the whole.

The mind is symbolic of the psalmist's intellect. Here is a person who has given attention to intellectual development—to being able to think critically, to being scientifically and culturally literate. Here is a person who recognizes the mind as part of the whole.

The walk is symbolic of the psalmist's manner of life. Here is a person who gives attention to living—to social relationships, to civic engagement, to making the world a better place for all. Here is a person who recognizes daily living as part of the whole.

The whole person, the psalmist tells us, encompasses our heart, our mind, and our walk. I'm not telling you much here which you don't already know—you're well-educated, after all. But some days we're prone to forget parts of the whole, so the psalmist paints a picture, or draws a three-sided diagram we may more easily remember.

"Prove me . . . try me . . . test my heart and mind . . . for I walk in faithfulness to you."

This picture of the three—heart, mind, and walk—is good, but by itself, as an abstract concept, I don't find it to be particularly interesting. Of greater intrigue, for me at least, is how these three come together, how they get jumbled up with each other, when they are actually lived out. Life, at least my life, doesn't come in a neat triangle with straight lines and points of change equi-distant from each other. Life, at least my life, is a whole lot messier.

So how do these three—heart, mind, and walk—actually become human? How are these three evidenced in the messiness of life? In John's words, where can I see, where can I hear, where can I actually touch a whole person?

The best answer I have found, the most fully developed, yet very messy, testimony of the whole person I have found, comes through spiritual memoir. It comes by entering the life of another, the life of someone who has been good enough to share their life publicly. We can flavor just a bit of this by brief references to the two most recent spiritual memoirs I've read. One is by Lewis Smedes—recently deceased; the other is by Anne Lamott—still kicking. Listen to the messiness of the whole lives of these two saints.

Lewis:

All in all, God seldom wore a happy face in my boyhood, and ever since the sadness of God has come more naturally to me than the joy of the Lord.

Anne:

Laughter is carbonated holiness.

Lewis:

My mother always said that God took specially good care of widows and never wondered why a God who cared so much for widows could not have prevented her from becoming one in the first place.

Anne:

Time, and showing up, turn most messes to compost, and something surprising may grow, and I have noticed this especially at my church.

Lewis:

It never pays to underestimate the mercy of God.

Anne:

You don't always get what you want, you get what you get.

Lewis:

I wrote several books . . . all of them after I became 50 years old.

Anne:

If you insist on having a destination when you come into a library, you're shortchanging yourself.

Lewis:

As a young lad I concluded I was among the reprobate, so I decided to take up sinning in a serious way. As I walked down the street one day, in our small town, I said, very loudly, "God damn it." The earth did not shake. Day did not turn into night. God did not turn me into a pillar of salt. It was as if he did not really give a rip about my sins, and why should he? If he had already damned me for eternity, why should God care about my crummy sins in the meantime?

Anne:

I live by the truth that "no" is a complete sentence. I rest as a spiritual act.

Lewis:

God heals our guilt by forgiving it. We heal other people's guilt by forgiving them. And in the process, we get hauled from the bitter poison of our memory of what they did to us.

Anne:

One secret of life is that the reason life works at all is that not everyone in your tribe is nuts on the same day.

Lewis:

Doris gave birth to a beautiful baby boy who died before he had lived a whole of a day. God's face has never looked the same to me since. . . . I am no more able to believe that God micro-manages the death of little children than I am able to believe that God was micro-managing Hitler's holocaust. With one morning's wrenching intuition, I knew that my portrait of God would have to be repainted. . . . The privilege of being the delicate organisms we are in the kind of world we live in comes at a price. The price is that things can go wrong, badly wrong sometimes, which should come as no surprise.

Anne:

I have a lot of faith. But I am also afraid a lot, and have no real certainty about anything. . . . The opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty. Certainty is missing the point entirely. Faith includes noticing the mess, the emptiness and discomfort, and letting it be there until some light returns. Faith also means reaching deeply within, for the sense one was born with, the sense, for example, to go for a walk. . . . Hope is not logical. It always comes as a surprise, just when you think all hope is lost. Hope is the cousin to grief, and both take time; you can't short-cut grief, or emptiness, and you can't patch it up with your bicycle tire tube kit.

Lewis and Anne. Two people. Two people with heart and mind tested by God. Two people who walk in faithfulness. Two people, often broken, yet whole.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.