

“To Be a Soul in Time”¹
Scholar’s Convocation sponsored by the Lilly Committee
Grinnell College, September 19, 2002

Kathleen Roberts Skerrett

In the middle of August, my husband and I decided that we would drive with our three small children from Grinnell, Iowa to visit their grandparents in Rhode Island for our summer vacation. Emma, who is three, responds to most forms of constraint as to a personal affront; and, it became clear to us that Emma viewed three days strapped into a car-seat as a violation of her civil rights.

Driving east on I-80, Emma began to make inquiries, such as, “Where *is* the airport, Daddy?” “Is Grandmummy meeting us somewhere?” Finally she settled on a chant, “I want to get out... I want to get out...” which she repeated many, many, many times. Until our five-year-old Madeleine turned around, and asked very kindly, really, “Do you want your sketchbook, Emma?” But this was the wrong moment. “NO!” Emma roared. “I want to get OUT. I want to get OOUUTTT of this CAAARRR!!!” This went on very loudly for some long minutes, until Emma lapsed into a fetid silence. Then Madeleine asked, “Do you want a red crayon?” Emma exploded, “NO! Stop talking to me, Madeleine! Stop talking to me! Let me out! Get me out of here NOW!!” Another more furious tantrum followed, which went on and on, very loudly, and only seemed like it might eventually subside...when Madeleine asked, “Do you want some teddy grahams, Emma?” I looked around. In Emma’s car-seat was a flame of rage.

And we hadn’t got past Iowa City.

So my husband said, “Madeleine, STOP talking to Emma.” And Madeleine said, “Dad, I’m trying to stop talking to Emma, but my brain keeps telling me, ‘talk to Emma... talk to Emma...’

A five-year-old’s insight into a common experience—one that we find compressed in those wrenching verses of Paul: “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” (*Letter to the Romans* 7: 15,19).

Iris Murdoch wrote lines, which I memorized many years ago: “We are not isolated free choosers, monarchs of all we survey, but benighted creatures sunk in a reality whose nature we are constantly and overwhelmingly tempted to deform by fantasy” (Murdoch, “Against Dryness”) It is clear that we are creatures who make choices; it is plain that our choices are consequential, but to think that our lives are the product of free choice is a fantasy. For this reason, I like the idea of vocation. I like the way it knocks the image of

¹ This talk was made for the students of Grinnell College, and delivered on September 19, 2002, as one of a series of talks on Vocation and the Liberal Arts, sponsored by the Lilly Committee. The phrase in the title is borrowed from Rowan Williams’, *Lost Icons*, 2000. In revising this for a reading audience, I have included citations to show the pervasive influence of others on my thinking, while trying to retain the feel of an address.

the free chooser a little off centre. Vocation means that you are called, and that the choices you must make are about how to respond.

The word vocation, from the Latin ‘vocare’, has a theological history. It does not mean career development or professional training. It means a summons by God to one’s particular life, and to the particular ministries or responsibilities of that life. For Protestant reformers, like Martin Luther, the sense of vocation encompassed any believer’s ordinary practice in the world. Every role, every responsibility, should be practiced as one’s religious vocation. This did not mean, for him, that God wants you to jockey into a job that you really, really like. It means that your soul is at stake in whatever you are doing now. Luther wrote, “We are not masters of our actions, from beginning to end, but servants” (*Disputation Against Scholastic Theology*).

This is an alien idea. Many of you have learned to think of yourselves as masters of so many credentials and skills. Your value or “merit” can be assessed on the basis of your resume and transcripts with murky adjustments made, depending on the confidence that your gender and ethnicity inspires in your employer. No one will ask, and you are strongly advised not to volunteer, whether God is calling you to the work at hand. This is because your spiritual life is supposed to have nothing to do with your work life. Your spiritual life is the hidden, secret, dimension of you that no one else must know about. You are required to keep your spiritual life to yourself, and you may *want* to keep it to yourself because you hope it will be an antidote to the rest of your life, should you ever have time.

But the idea of vocation spoils all this. It implies that you cannot separate out the ordinary ways you act in time from the time it takes to be a soul. You are called to live in the fullness of time through those experiences that take time to unfold: desire, remorse, grief, and praise. So I want to say a little about those experiences here.

We live in the milieu of time and contingency. By this, I mean that we live in radical interdependence and implication with other living beings, human and extra-human; they share with us, among other things, the condition of time. That is, they are born, eat, grow, mate, give birth and die according to fairly regular schedules. There is extraordinary diversity among species’ schedules, and there is some impressive coordination of this diversity, but there is no master plan. The milieu of contingency is vaster than we can perceive, more intricate than we can imagine, more generative than we know. Every moment is saturated with possibilities, emergent from the deep texture of things.

But those possibilities never include that of returning to the moment before. [For some of you, whose adolescence is more recent than mine, this is a huge relief.] And, it is precisely this irreversibility that makes freedom tragic and contingency difficult to bear. You cannot go back--not even to moments that have past so close they are still warm. You are always choosing in the midst of complex circumstances whose implications you cannot fully perceive; and once you do have a concrete sense of at least some of those implications, there is no way back to the moment where you might have or should have

chosen otherwise. Meanwhile, the whole kaleidoscope of living beings has shifted, and your next choice must be made once again in conditions of ambiguity and uncertainty.

There are some basic strategies for mitigating the difficulty of this condition. You can try to ensure that your choices are conventional, so at least no one will blame you if things go wrong; or, you can retreat into a self-contained and self-controlled life, although that is often a fantasy, sustained by interdependence on others whom you ignore. You can try to master the contingencies, by eradicating the alien ones at ‘a time and a place of your choosing’. But that approach often leads to what William Connolly calls “the globalization of contingency”— threats that start to break out all over the place when we act as though our freedom is not qualified by the responses of other beings in time (*Why I Am Not a Secularist*).

Each choice we make leads to new constraints. Faced with this knowledge, we may long for the airiness of possibility that choosing in fantasy gives. But to be responsible means choosing in time, and that always involves risk that there will be dangers you did not foresee, accidents you did not expect, victims who were unknown. In C.S. Lewis’s Narnia books, little Lucy Pevensie asks Aslan, with anguish, “If I had done things differently, would everything have come out all right?” Aslan always gives the same response: “No one can ever learn what *would* have happened, but anyone can find out what *will* happen” (C.S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian*). To experience one’s vocation in the practice of ordinary life means letting go our fantasies of what might have happened in order to turn towards what *will* happen with courage and hope.

In our visually saturated culture, we have learned to represent ourselves to each other through images not stories; these images are as ageless and sterile as we can fake them—polished, happy, competent, and still. Since none of us has lives that correspond to these images, we don’t know how to cope with vibrant feelings that of necessity take time to develop and unfold, that demand stories not images. Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, observes that contemporary British life is characterized by a suppressed emotional panic. It erupts in civic cruelty, road rage, or demands for moral certitude in tragic or just plain confusing situations. Our emotional panic does not just make us defensive and self-righteous; it makes us vengeful (*Lost Icons*).

Who can you trust and what do you risk if you allow others to see how anxious you are, or that your grief over a particular loss hasn’t concluded a ‘normal’ course? Who do you trust and what do you risk if you allow others to see your unconventional or unauthorized love? What if someone finds out that you are queer or fat or poor or hurt or weird or human? I don’t mean this facetiously; I think there are real risks associated with these revelations and the stories that they demand. So you whisper to each other, or confess to a wise therapist or priest who will allow that you have a soul.

The more difficult task seems to be imagining others as individual with stories too. For even if we can learn to see ourselves as creatures whose moods and motivations are complicated with stories, other people remain pretty transparent to casual psychological or moral diagnoses. We discover ourselves to be complex in distressing, yet fascinating,

ways. But others are sick or perverts or evil. We use forensic or therapeutic theories in order to contain the perspective of others, so that when they speak, their speech may be regarded as symptomatic of the condition they purport to disclaim. This makes it easy for us to refuse any process of communication with others wherein our vibrant reaction to them would have to be set in a story that *also* encompasses the others' vibrant reaction to us. (Rowan Williams, *Lost Icons*).

To be a soul in time means that you will have to live through those feelings—desire, remorse, and grief--that can only be captured in stories. To quote Rowan Williams, “There are things you will learn only by passing through this process, by being caught up in this series of relations and transformations.” (“Keeping Time” from *A Ray of Darkness*). So I want to say a little about these unsettling experiences that will be inevitably woven through your sense of vocation as it unfolds in time.

Desire

In a society that entices desire into obsessive but vacuous ends, it is hard to imagine desire as the fuse of your soul. It is hard to imagine desire as that passion that is a symptom of your belonging in time to God. But Augustine wrote: “The whole life of a good Christian is a holy desire...This is our life, that by longing we should be exercised” (*Homilies on the First Epistle of John*). Desire is indispensable to the soul's growth in time; at the same time—and Augustine would hasten to acknowledge this—human desire is pretty much of a mess. We can desire some very silly things. Yet we learn through many confused and conflicting experiences of desire the pattern of our own *incompleteness*-- not the shape of a hole--but the outline of our advancing, unfinished edge.

Plato relates the story of a priestess named Diotima who taught Socrates that desire is lack, and that what desire lacks is beauty. But Augustine would say—and perhaps, in some moods, Plato would too—what moves desire is not lack, but delight. You are moved by delight out of yourself (*Homilies on the Gospel of John*). In this account, desire does not seek an object to possess; rather, it arcs among beings, melting their edges and lighting up the spaces among them (Ann Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*). The melting edge, the lit space; this is where the story of your vocation unfolds.

David Campbell said last week [in the first convocation talk sponsored by the Lilly Committee] that he discovered his vocation among people who were illiterate but exquisitely sensitive to the other beings around them. And David feels a loss, I think, in the “papery world” where he and many of us live and work.

Anne Carson, the Canadian classicist and poet, suggests that a psychological shift accompanied the move from oral to literate culture. In the former, human beings are highly attuned to sensory exchange among living beings in one's environment; one does not imagine a human being as a contained volume, rather more like a set of strings that vibrate at the slightest touch. But in a literate culture, to become a competent reader and writer, the visual sense has to predominate, so you must dampen your other senses (as anyone who lives in a dormitory knows). You must imagine yourself as a contained and

concentrated subject. In a literate culture, you experience the other's presence within your consciousness as an intrusion: "How could the other's smell, voice, touch, get inside me except by some violation?" (Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*). Ancient Greek poetry reflects the moment of transition between oral to literate culture, Carson argues, when the contingency of desire is experienced as an emergency of the self, because the melting edge implies that one is indeed *not* a self-contained or self-controlled volume. There is a loss in our papery world. The image of the self-contained consciousness is, as James Hans writes, "a definition in flight from the reality it purports to describe" (*Fate of Desire*).

Yet, for all our concentration, we remain open to the pleasure and danger of other beings; they call on us in ways that reverberate within. The milieu of contingency, in which we experience desire, is not an arena of billiard balls knocking into each other. We do not just interact on the surface; the "tendrils" of another presence touches your "receptors", to use David Campbell's evocative words, and suddenly you are awake and alive to the possibilities of what happens next. Desire means that other vivid presences are our contingencies, just as we are theirs. This is not always a happy experience. But I think--and I say this without innocence--one should not desire to transcend desire; desire is the mode of one's transcendence in time.

Remorse

If desire is key to our experience of having been summoned or drawn beyond ourselves, desire also involves us in remorse. This is not only because of our own contradictoriness and confusion, or because we can be moved by incommensurable delights. Rather, as Rene Girard has argued, desire generates competition and rivalry, and these in turn ignite predictable cycles of violence and revenge (*Violence and the Sacred*). Yet at the historical moment when these cycles are most dangerous, the experience of remorse is becoming less and less intelligible to us (Rowan Williams, *Lost Icons*).

Remorse is a kind of emotional damage you feel in yourself that corresponds to the damage another has suffered because of you. Americans, I think, have a difficult time distinguishing between remorse and liability. If someone is not legally liable for an action, then one need not feel remorseful; one does not owe the other 'damages'. Of course, remorse *can* be commensurate with liability, when damage to another results from one's acting in a way that intentionally or negligently causes harm to another. But we seem to have lost the ability to make remorse intelligible beyond a finding of liability. If you are guilty, you should pay your debt to society, which may involve no remorse at all, or you pay assigned damages to the victim, which is usually a transaction conducted among lawyers and insurance agents, none of whom has much to do with remorse. In either of these processes, your remorse is at best inarticulate suffering, at worst, a loose cannon on the deck of justice.

I know a man, who was in a car accident late at one night. He was driving a woman home from a party—she was a young actress—and it was a foggy night along the lakeshore. As he proceeded through an intersection, another car jumped careened through the red light, and struck his car, and she was badly injured, especially her face.

And when he was able to walk, he went to her room to sit and talk with her. He felt terrible about what had happened. And, to be honest, he wasn't sure really what had happened—he was tired that night, it was dark, and in the fog everything seems dream-like and strange. But he knew that the woman's life had been changed forever, and that he was a proximate cause of that, and he felt a great deal of remorse. But when his lawyer found out that he was visiting the woman, the lawyer was furious. "If you need to talk to someone about your feelings, see a psychiatrist."

In the milieu of contingency, we are often operating exhausted, in the dark and the fog. The ambiguity of social situations, the incommensurability of perspectives--the "difficulty and opacity of persons" (Iris Murdoch again)--means that we do damage to others that does not correspond to our intentions. When we conflate remorse with liability, it becomes difficult to imagine remorse in the absence of liability. [This is particularly dangerous in America right now: You perceive that you have a right to act; you perceive an ethical obligation to act; yet you destroy the lives of thousands of poor people thousands of miles away when you do. Collateral damage is regrettable, but not your concern. It is not true that those who hate Americans hate freedom. Most of the rest of the world admires and envies American freedom—quite openly. What they hate, I think--and I say this with my resident alien card clutched in hand--what they hate is the national image of *remorselessness*, the insistence that because the United States acts with enormous power, it has *in actuality* unqualified freedom.]

We want to believe that if we act responsibly, then we are entitled to a clear conscience. Yet if we will not see the collateral damage we do, then it is very hard to become responsible in time. And there are those contingent responses that develop over time, which will always shock us because, in the absence of remorse, they seem to come out of the blue.

There are risks associated with remorse, as Rowan Williams observes. There is the risk that those who have been harmed will respond to your remorse with defensiveness or vengeance. There is the risk is that you can experience your remorse as comparable to the harm done to the victim, as a wound that the victim ought to relieve for you by forgiveness and reconciliation. Yet, despite these risks, without remorse there is no hope of forgiveness or reconciliation. Remorse, at least leaves open that possibility, which can be, more often than we think, realized in time (Rowan Williams, *Lost Icons*).

In surveys in the past, Grinnell students have expressed relatively low levels of ambition for leadership positions, either in corporate, religious or civic life. They have rightly perceived that leadership of institutions or communities involves you in ambiguous concerns, requires you to make compromising decisions, raises the risk that your failures will be more consequential and damaging than otherwise. Do no harm seems to be the mantra. And I admire that sensitivity. But I think you must put your sensitivity into the service of responsible choice. And that means seeking and taking the risk of judgement under those circumstances where you can indeed do harm, and where the consequences of your actions are amplified by institutional reach and resources. People who are leaders rarely experience themselves as 'monarchs of all they survey.' They often feel precisely

like “benighted creatures sunk,” to recall Iris Murdoch’s phrase again. But that is not a good reason to avoid leadership; although it may be a good reason to be generous to the leaders we do have.

•*Grief*

To be a soul in time means inevitably to be a soul in grief. Henry Staten has suggested that grief is the horizon of desire in Western experience. We cannot possess forever the things we desire because they constantly change in time, and so we are always losing them (*Eros in Mourning*). I don’t entirely agree with Staten’s conception of desire. But I think he is right to observe that the murmur of good-bye within mortal loves can make us want to escape to God, to some eternal embrace where “we will lose nothing.” (Augustine, *Confessions*).

The fourth century theologian, Augustine of Hippo envisioned just such an escape. After the death of a young man he loved, in his early twenties, Augustine discovered that the world had become duller. It wasn’t just longing for his friend that made grief terrible; it was the blankness of the world without that beloved friend in it. Life had become trivial and boring, his own soul was a burden he dragged through the days. Two decades afterwards, Augustine still remembered that early grief as a kind of undeadness (*Confessions*, Book IV). One’s exhilaration at the details of life starts at the centre of a web of attachments. Desire, Anne Carson has written, sends radiant tangents between love and beloved, lighting the spaces between them (*Eros the Bittersweet*). We don’t always notice the shimmering lines of attachment that are interwoven with our experience of life; yet, in the midst of these, our senses are alive, and our spirits thrill. The loss of a loved one tears that web; you feel yourself hanging by a thread.

I was in Toronto with Madeleine last weekend to celebrate my grandmother’s ninetieth birthday. At the party, my cousin John showed me an old photo. In the centre was the lovely face of a woman, kneeling on grass, a white hat fallen at her feet, and from either side she was being mobbed by two small children, a boy of about four, I think, and a little girl about two and a half. “Do you know who they are?” asked my cousin John. I have seen several formal portraits of that woman. But this was the first time I had seen a picture of her, spontaneous, slightly off balance between the two children, her face, in an unguarded moment, pure joy. “Gertrude Torrance,” I said. “And that must be Alec and Gwen.”

Several years after that photo was taken, Gertrude Torrance spent many months in a sanatorium, hoping to recover from tuberculosis; the children were not permitted to visit. After she left home, they never saw her again. She died when she was about forty, leaving three young sons and her eleven year-old daughter. Alec and Gwen were her first children. Until I saw the photo, I hadn’t really thought about those early years when it was just the two of them, Alec and Gwen. They were very close. Alec was invited to be the best man at Gwen’s wedding; I’ve read the letter he wrote in response. You get a sense of him—his warmth and wit and pleasure in being asked. But Alec died when he was twenty-eight of a ruptured appendix. He had been married himself only a little more than a year. His young widow kept in touch with Gwen for decades after his death.

Gwen never speaks of her mother or her brother without evident love and sorrow. I don't think she has ever stopped missing them. But she has lived a wonderful life—ordinary in its outline, extraordinary in its grace. She turned ninety this past Monday.

When my cousin asked me, 'do you know who they are?' I realized that he had been raised, as I was, to love Gertrude, Alec, and others-- people who died before we were born. There was never anything morbid in this. We were taught to remember and love them because they were wonderful. Even as a child, I understood that we were joined to them through time and in time. They were a gift to us, and, now that I have children of my own, I understand better that we were also a gift to them.

The fullness of time and contingency gives to us and takes from us irreplaceable, beloved individuals. Certainly, grief can be a way of disillusionment, a long undeadness that wants release. But grief enfolds within it the certain knowledge that in and through the milieu of contingency wonderful creatures *live*. Grief means that you have experienced this, not hypothetically, but empirically, concretely. It means that you know what is *possible*, and therefore grief always folds within it embers of praise.

[My grandmother, Gwen Morris, died on December 26, 2002.]

In the fourth century, Gregory of Nyssa wrote a pair of treatises that feature his sister Macrina as a brilliant Socratic teacher. Both these treatises are framed by the death of people whom Gregory loved. The second treatise is a dialogue between Macrina, as she lay dying of cancer, and her brother, who cannot shake the distress of mourning. She was the one who taught him that to seek satiation of desire is insolence in a creature. She expected, she *wanted*, to continue in the joy and anguish of love, even after her death. For, "If love is taken from us," she asked Gregory, "how then how shall we be united to God?" (Gregory of Nyssa, *Resurrection of the Soul*)

The historian, Peter Brown has observed that Gregory lived with a great sadness at the center of his life. Yet many years later, when he was an old man, Gregory wrote strange and beautiful theology. In these texts is a line I memorized years ago: "Never to achieve satiety of desiring is truly to see God." (*Life of Moses*) It is a remarkable insight, hard to grasp, hard to bear. At the end of his life, Gregory conceived the soul as being irreducibly mutable; he imagined the soul must keep desiring and growing as it unfolds in the radiant darkness of God. The melting edge; the flash of desire; the story of transformation--these will remain when all that remains in the soul is love.

• *Vocation*

How do we find our way in time, in the radiant darkness of the incomprehensible reality in which we live? In his novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Milan Kundera observes that his characters conceive symbols of "higher life" out of coincidences over which they have no control. The contingencies that flow over their lives are a matter of chance, yet they grasp certain of these coincidences as fortuitous events, as meaningful signs that summon them. A coincidence is suddenly captured as a metaphor, and meaning flashes between two positions that were in no other way conjoined, the flash of

imagination, the force of desire. “If a love is to be unforgettable,” Kundera writes, “fortuities must immediately start fluttering down to it like birds to Francis of Assis’s shoulders.” Our alertness to this “fluttering down” expresses the image of beauty, the delight that moves our desire.

You are swept by contingencies every day, which offer innumerable possibilities to your imagination; it is among them that you will perceive the fortuities that will be the signs of your vocation.

Remember the story David Campbell told at convocation last week--of his standing on the beach off Cape Canaveral, as the first rocket to the moon prepared to take off--of his standing on the beach, watching a horseshoe crab crawl from her world in the sea to the sand. Do you remember the metaphoric charge that crackled between the shimmering rocket across the bay and the mute crab lumbering from the sea? David’s imagination grasped those two events in one meaningful image. In the moment it took David to see the crab and the men in the rocket as conjoined in their daring--in their willingness to risk their lives at the melting edge of their familiar world--a fortuity formed. He compassed the men in the rocket and the lumbering crab as creatures of one process, homologous in their striving, analogous in time. But in that moment, also, David experienced *his* vocation, his own call to higher life. A chance coincidence that was easily overlooked by the two men standing there, became unforgettable, so that even those of us who heard about it decades later could still see the fortuitous tangent that runs between the crab and the rocket.

Fortuities are signs that call to you, come further out, come higher up. They are given in time and through contingency, rich, potent, consequential, yet composed of stuff that is just crawling around on the ground. You need to know something in order to perceive fortuities; they don’t come with labels on them. You need to understand the evolutionary homology between the crab and the men in order to feel the analogical zap of their coincidence that night. Vocation is not just a matter of aptitude or even of your bliss; it involves perception, imagination, and responsiveness. And these are enhanced the more finely aware you can become of the miracle of structure, design, pattern, composition, rhythm, allusion, causation, symbol.

And, it is in this sense, I would say, that education in the liberal arts should be a great help to you. It should help you learn about patterns of contingency, their creativity as well as their doom; their prodigious beauty as well as their waste. Your liberal arts education should help you to build up a repertoire of images and allusions, increasing the chance that fortuities will flutter down on you and make your loves unforgettable.

•*Praise*

There is a small skirmish in twentieth century theology over the status of desire and love; there are those who argue that love is *not* desire. Desire is an appetite, whereas love is something you give. Desire seeks to possess the other; whereas love seeks to serve. Desire looks at the other’s qualifications; whereas love creates the other’s value (Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*). These oppositions would be more persuasive to me if they

were not so often aimed at demonstrating that love is the unique innovation of Christians, whereas desire was the best that the Greeks could do. The Greek-speaking theologian, Origen, though, considered such distinctions in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, and concluded--desire is charity inflamed. Wherever Christian scripture speaks of charity, Origen suggests, you should not imagine a sort of general administrative benevolence; you should imagine *passionate* love; imagine praise.

Sometimes we feel love emanating from us, as energy in praise of another's being (Ortega y Gasset, *On Love*). Sometimes we feel love as pure gladness that some unique being is alive, and our love is active witness to the wonder that they exist. Sometimes love is praise. Fortuities flutter down on people who live in praise because the plenitude of being summons them, and love emanates from them in response.

During the last year I lived in Canada, an elderly Anglican priest along with his wife were clubbed to death in their bed by three local boys in the dark hours before dawn. The boys were taken into custody within days of the murder because they had bragged about it at school. It was devastating. On the day of the funeral, the congregation at the Cathedral was huge, raw, dangerous in its distress, and sullen in its disbelief. I saw someone shove an usher out the way when he tried to stop people from entering the overcrowded church. But if Anglicans can do anything, we can do liturgy. The procession, the music, the readings, the sermon, the Eucharist, -- all gathered up that furious, heart-broken energy and transformed it. At one point, I looked over to see a middle-aged man, in a professional suit, with his eyes shut and his mouth wide open, singing as if his life depended on it. It was the image of that man-- wailing out one of the loveliest of Anglican hymns--that struck my heart that day. Later, I learned that he was the son of the murdered priest and his wife.

The reality in which we live does not ask for our approval nor offer consolation. Yet even in the midst of anguish, there may be moments of peeled awareness where we meet the plenitude of being with praise.

I don't know that I can tell you to follow your bliss, as David did. But I think I can tell you that you are called to praise. And if praise does not always feel like bliss, it is because it unfolds in time and encompasses desire, remorse, and grief--those experiences that time gives and that take time to unfold. You are called to praise. And that is a good vocation for a human being, possibly the chief one for which you were made.