

The Road Less Traveled – June 19, 2020

I remember a number of years ago counseling a couple who had lost their 9-year-old son to a tragic accident. It was about three months after his death, and they were shocked by their experience at the grocery store. The little boy's mom said they were making their way down the cereal aisle, and she simply lost it when she saw his favorite cereal.

She thought she was OK. She told me she thought they were doing pretty well, under the circumstances. But in that moment, the gravity of their loss simply overwhelmed her, and she broke down right there in front of the Captain Crunch. "Is it always going to be this way?" she asked. "No," I said. "Because we heal. We get better. But it is indicative of the new normal in your life."

"New normal" is a phrase that people who counsel others love. We love it because it is an acknowledgement of that which we don't like to admit. Change is difficult. Change is painful. Change is disruptive. Sometimes that change is gut-wrenching, as in the context of a death. In an instant, someone important to us, someone central to our very being, is taken from us. And it leaves us empty, hollow. And we have to find a way to go on with a hole in our lives. And that hole represents our new normal.

But sometimes the change is more subtle. There isn't one moment in time that changed everything. It's more of a gradual loss that leaves us looking back wondering what happened. That may be the sense that you had when you came to worship last Sunday.

On Sunday we resumed in-person worship at Aledo UMC after a three-month hiatus. For many of us – and I definitely count myself among us – it promised to be glorious return to a normal that we lost back in March. But in some ways, it didn't feel like a return to normal.

Because it wasn't.

We gathered in the Sanctuary for worship, but we didn't shake hands and hug each other. We didn't sing. We entered by ourselves and left by ourselves. We didn't do some of the things that made the hour seem like worship. And if you are feeling something less than normal, then I would say that you are feeling just right.

The reality is that things have changed. Our entire context has changed. An invisible pathogen – a tiny virus that we cannot see – has changed everything. The statistics don't matter. The fact that odds are we won't get the virus doesn't matter. The possibility is there. The chance is there. And so we have to plan for the unlikely. Prudence and love demands that we do so.

And that means things are different. Things don't feel right.

I understand. I get it. And if you feel unsettled, if you feel angry, I get that, too.

But here's what I will tell you about the New Normal. The New Normal, as painful as it is, represents an opportunity. It's hard to see in the moment, but it represents an opportunity. In that moment of pain, the family I mentioned before found the inspiration to raise money and lobby Congress for changes in the way we conduct Epilepsy research in this country. And today, nearly 10 years later, that effort continues to bear fruit.

And with regard to your loss? Well it is a loss, to be sure. But in the midst of that loss Aledo UMC was forced to move worship online, and that move meant that our worship of God was made available to people around the world, far away from our little enclave on the outskirts of Fort Worth. People whom we don't know and will never meet are worshiping God along with us. Lives which will not intersect ours are being changed. And, friends, that's not nothing.

And so, what I will say about the New Normal is that, as painful as it is, it represents opportunity. And the New Normal suggests that if we are to be faithful to our call, we must embrace that opportunity. And so, as we go through this painful season of change, let us see it as an opportunity to be a part of something truly new, something truly holy.

See you Sunday!