

The Road Less Traveled – November 22, 2019

A few years ago I spent several days living in the dorm at Texas Wesleyan University, and it brought back lots of memories. During my undergraduate years I lived in the dorm, first as a freshman resident, then for three years as an R.A. I found myself remembering the unique nature of dorm life: getting locked out in the middle of the night, the smell of burned popcorn in the community microwave and yelling “flush!” in the bathroom so if some poor soul happened to be in the shower, they wouldn’t be scalded when the cold water rushed out.

But I also remembered some the quirks that come with aging dormitories. The first night I was on the Texas Wesleyan campus, the shower in my room didn’t seem to have any hot water. So after a cold shower, I sought out a facilities expert first thing the next morning. “Oh,” he said. “You’re in 118. The plumbing is reversed in that bathroom. You have to turn it to cold to get hot water.”

Fair enough. So later that night, I stepped into the shower, turned the faucet to “cold” and waited anxiously for the hot water to flow. And flow it did! Almost immediately the water began to warm up ... and it didn’t stop. Turns out not only was the plumbing in the shower reversed, but the valve didn’t function properly. The bottom line was that there were only two choices: hot or cold – and all the way on both sides. It didn’t matter where you set the faucet on the “hot” side; the water was scalding. And it didn’t matter how gently I eased it toward “cold,” the water was freezing. And so I spent the rest of the week alternating back and forth between cold and hot, ducking into the water in those brief intervals between the two, when the water was – just for an instant – warm and soothing, bringing the comfort only a warm shower can.

It occurs to me that that it is precisely the place where we are as the church. As human beings firmly rooted in American culture, we live squarely in the world of the secular. The images and message that our culture communicate are that life is all about us and our own enjoyment and satisfaction, and that our success is measured by what we accomplish and what we can acquire.

But in the midst of the secular, there is the divine. There is the God who calls us and challenges us to a life of service and sacrifice, a life that promises that the path of a true human being is found not in individual achievement, but in the individual calling to serve. It is a life that promises that the ultimate blessing is in the call to bless others.

The church exists between those two realities, the interval between the secular and the divine where we experience – sometimes for the briefest of instants -- the warm and soothing comfort that only God can bring. It’s what we do as the church, whether it be caring for those who are hurting, reaching out to those who need a helping hand and a reminder that God is at work in their lives, worshiping, or exploring together the intricacies of Holy Scripture.

We are the place – the community – that brings those two worlds together. In other words, holy ground.

I’ll see you there on Sunday.