

The Road Less Traveled – June 9, 2017

The Bearcat Nation is in mourning once again. In what is becoming an all-too-common story, our community awoke Wednesday morning to the news that we had lost another one of our students. Justin Davidson, a member of the Aledo High School Class of 2020, passed away, leaving behind a devastated family and grieving friends.

Justin was not a regular part of our church family, but he had friends here and participated in our Student Ministries from time to time. I did not know Justin, but I came to know him on Wednesday as I visited with the dozens of students who came to our Sanctuary to pray, cry, hold each other and ask the inevitable questions.

And as people of faith, that's really where we find ourselves in times like this. Asking questions. Why do these things happen? How do we deal with this type of tragedy, whether adult or student? Where is God in the midst of all of this? As adults we ask those same questions about tragedy near and far. Today, our kids are asking them.

And here's the hard truth. Today, there are no answers, or at least very few. It feels like, as people of faith, that we should have some sort of inside track on those answers, but we don't. It feels like as people of faith that we should have some special, magic words to say to make everything better, but we don't. What we do have, though – in fact all we have – is a God who waits for us. What we have is a God who steps off with us on a journey of healing, a journey whose end we can't even yet visualize. A God who stands ready to absorb all of the feelings – shock, grief, outrage, bewilderment – that overflows our overwhelmed hearts.

And we have each other. We have our church family. And as a church family one of the most important things we do is to create a space, a safe space so that those who are hurting can seek out God in the midst of that hurt. No time is that more important than right now, when our kids are the ones who are hurting. If you ever find yourself wondering why we do Student Ministry, today is the answer. It is so we can create the space and the relationships for our young men and women to bring the best and worst that life heaps on them, and then help them to find God in the midst of it. Not to give them platitudes or easy answers, but to encourage them to wrestle with the questions. Because they are asking them – every day. I can't think of a better place for them to do it.

For those of us who are parents, we also are called to create that space. In times like this I am often asked by parents, "What do I tell my kids?" Tell them that you love them. Tell them what they mean to you. Be honest and tell them that there isn't anything you can say or do to make it better. But also, tell them that you are there to hurt, to grieve, right alongside them. Because people who love each other do life together.

Most of all, help them to connect with God. Help them to seek out Jesus. And help them to do it honestly, authentically. And I say that because sometimes young people are anxious or

guilty over what they feel at a time like this. They could be angry with God, furious even. They may blame God or, at the very least, wonder where God was. Reassure them that God wants to hear it. That God is big enough and strong enough to hear what is on their hearts. Because in those moments, real, authentic prayer happens. And healing begins.

I don't have all the answers. Neither do you. But here is what I do know. God was the first one to grieve for the loss of Justin on this earth, even as God welcomed him into eternal life. And God grieves for each one of us who are dealing with the loss of one so young. And I know that, while many of our kids and parents are facing some difficult days ahead, there is hope. I don't know yet what it looks like exactly, but I know where to find it. I know who has it. And I know that the One who has it wants desperately to share it.

So hold your kids tight. And tell them the story of hope.

See you Sunday.