

The Road Less Traveled – October 19, 2018

Prayer is a tricky thing. We are called to be a people of prayer. Most of us agree on that. We are called to regularly engage in the practice of both listening for God, as well as talking to God – sharing with God what’s on our hearts. In many cases that talking also involves asking – asking for God to be active in our lives; asking God to intervene to help things turn out the way we want.

That’s where it gets tricky. Because inevitably the time will come when things do not turn out the way we want. Maybe we pray for healing for a loved one who is suffering from cancer, only to have cancer eventually claim her life. Maybe we pray for the blessing of a child, only to have a doctor tell us that carrying a child will be impossible. Maybe we pray for healing in our marriage, only to see it eventually crumble into ruin. Maybe we pray for that new job – that perfect position that will finally put us on sound financial footing – only to see it go to someone else. Whatever scenario you paint, you can count on it eventually happening. Your prayers will seemingly go unanswered.

And I know, some will argue that there is no such thing as unanswered prayer. That sometimes the answer from God is simply ‘no.’ And I get that, and I believe it. But it doesn’t matter. When the person you have been praying for succumbs to his illness, it feels like God somehow dropped the ball.

That kind of theology, however, misses the point of prayer entirely. Because prayer is, first and foremost, about relationship. Prayer is one of the key ways that we communicate with God and God communicates with us. When we pray for a loved one, the point isn’t to convince God to create the result that we want; the point is to share with God what is on our heart. Our hopes. Our dreams. Our fears. Our aspirations. Our deepest longing. The point is to be open, honest and vulnerable enough with God to say, “God, more than anything in the world, I want _____ to happen. God, I would give anything if _____ would experience healing.” And so on. That we get what we want isn’t important. That we are faithful in our prayer life with God is. That faithful prayer life is simply our part of the covenant with God.

It’s much the same between all of us as we approach Commitment Sunday. In a couple of weeks we will have the opportunity to bring our pledge cards to the altar and ask God to bless our commitment to our church family for the coming year. We will renew our covenant together as a faith family and be reminded of the vows that lie at the heart of that covenant – that we each will uphold and support the ministries of Aledo United Methodist Church through our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness. Each family will have a pledge card that invites you to articulate specifically the ways you will live out those vows in the coming year.

It is an important moment in the life of our church family. Not just to help those planning for next year know what to expect in terms of resources, but because it represents us

reaffirming those vows that we took upon joining this family, kind of like a couple renewing their wedding vows. And what's important, first and foremost, is that everyone is a part of it. What's important is that everyone who calls this church home is willing to renew those vows, say 'yes' once again to the covenant that binds us and to look to the future together.

Those little cards are the key. Those little cards represent your 'yes' to our covenant. You see, it isn't so much about *what* you pledge. It's about *that* you pledge. What you pledge is, ultimately, a matter between you and God. It's a matter of you discerning what it means to be faithful in your particular context. But that you pledge is between us. It's a family matter. Because it's what we promised each other when we began this journey together. We vowed that we would be faithful, that we would be good stewards of our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness to the benefit of this faith community and to the glory of God. We promised our best, because God has already given us His.

Those little cards are the key. You will receive yours in the mail in the next few days. And when you do, don't put it aside. Instead, pray over it. Discern how God is calling you to be faithful to our covenant. And then fill it out and lay it on the altar on Commitment Sunday. We don't have a percentage goal as to how many cards we get back this year versus last year. We're expecting to hear from everyone. I am expecting to hear from everyone. Because our covenant is only as strong as everyone's willingness to be faithful to it. Everyone.

See you Sunday.