

## **The Road Less Traveled – December 16, 2016**

As we make our way through this Advent season, we have been talking about stories, the traditions that shape our families' Christmas celebrations and point us, ultimately, to the real light of the season. I was asked the other day to share my favorite Christmas tradition, and I had to stop and think about it for a moment. I thought of the Christmas Brunch that Melissa has made every Christmas for the past 25 years. I thought about the worship services we've shared and the kids opening gifts on Christmas morning. And then I thought about Elmo, and I knew that was it.

For years I have read to the kids a variety of Christmas books, but by far their favorite has been "Elmo's Twelve Days of Christmas." Published by Little Golden Books, the book reimagines the classic Christmas song as it might be sung by the Muppets – *Five calling monsters, three French Friends, two yummy cookies, and a red monster up in a tree* -- you get the idea. At some point, many years ago, I got creative and began using voices of Elmo, Cookie Monster and the other Muppets and started singing the song rather than reading the book. Then I began acting out the various things the monsters did on each day of Christmas. My rendition of the book never failed to leave the kids rolling on the floor with laughter, especially Emma.

I look and sound like an idiot, I know. But it's tradition. And I wouldn't skip it for the world.

Over the years the boys have sort of grown out of the tradition, but Emma still loves it and looks forward to the book coming out of the Christmas decorations box each year. When we moved to Aledo, somehow the book got lost, and I had to find a new one via a used book seller on Amazon. Since then it stays on Emma's bookshelf year-round.

I may only sing the song once or twice during the Christmas season, but it wouldn't be Christmas without it.

That's the power of tradition. Whether it's a special decoration, a particular holiday dish, or an annual practice, the magic lies not in the tradition itself but in the memory it evokes and the future that it promises. For my family, the power of the book isn't the story or even the goofy way I tell it, it's the promise that the joy we share in the midst of the story will always come again next year.

May your traditions bring you joy this Christmas season.

See you Sunday.