

The Road Less Traveled – December 6, 2019

I love high school football. Always have. I follow professional football ... sort of. I mean I turn on the TV when the Cowboys are playing and keep up with the game, but I rarely sit down and watch one from beginning to end. I enjoy college football, but I don't passionately follow any particular team. When I was in college our football team was pretty bad, so I never really caught the bug. But high school football is a different story. I still view that level of the sport as unspoiled. It's not about business and money as much as it is about passion and a love of the game.

So I consider myself fortunate to be a Bearcat fan, to be part of the excitement of state championships and to see, week in and week out, the game played at such a high level. But as exciting as the games are, they are only the tip of the iceberg, the fruits of a bank of hard labor that began years earlier. State championships don't begin at AT&T Stadium. They begin on dusty youth practice fields when pre-adolescent boys don pads for the first time. They begin in the midst of youth sports programs that run many of the same plays and teach the same skills as the Bearcat varsity players display under the Friday night lights. Excellence doesn't begin with hard work. It begins with a commitment to excellence. Without that commitment, hard work ultimately becomes just that – hard work.

The same can be said, frankly, for any endeavor. Hard work is important. Being smart is important. Even being lucky plays a role. But ultimately success begins with commitment. A commitment to excellence and a commitment to the vision that drives that endeavor. I think that is especially true of us as a church.

The church is a unique place. We are on a shared journey and embrace a shared vision: to cultivate a passion for Jesus Christ. But the truth is that the thing that drew us here is different for all of us. Some of us were looking for a place to help us raise godly kids in an increasingly frightening and dangerous world. Some of us were looking for a place to belong. Some of us were looking for a place to deepen an already existing faith. Some of us were looking for a place that would allow us to dip our toes in the water of faith for the first time. And so on.

So we all got here following different paths. But now that we are here, we are called to come together to pursue a common dream, to work together to make a common vision a shared reality. It's hard work, or at least it can be at times. But what transforms that work into ministry is our shared commitment to the vision, to the dream. If we don't share that dream, that vision, then we simply engage in hard work.

That's why I have pushed so hard this year for every family that calls Aledo UMC home to make the commitment to be part of the life and ministry of our church. To reaffirm their commitment to live out the vows that we all affirmed when we joined the church. Because if we don't share in the commitment, then we will struggle to share in the dream.

I am thrilled with your response thus far. But not everyone is on board. There are still some families who have not reaffirmed their vows of their prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness. Maybe you are still praying about it. Maybe you just forgot. And that's OK. We still have some time, and cards are still coming in every day.

But here's the thing. I am not going to be satisfied until I get the report that every member family is on board. Because if everyone is not on board, then I am convinced we will struggle to keep ourselves focused on our vision. It's not just about money. It's not about where you pledge to serve the church, it's about *that* you pledge to serve the church. It's not about how much you pledge to give in 2020, it's about *that* you pledge to be part of the financial life of the church.

It's about the commitment.

So if you have not climbed on board yet, please consider why not. We are a family, and we are engaged in holy work together. I believe God is doing something amazing through this congregation. But it takes all of us. We are the body of Christ. And without everyone on board, the body is incomplete. And so is our work.

See you Sunday.