

The Road Less Traveled – April 28, 2017

Some food for thought on a Friday morning.

On Tuesday, I had the privilege of sitting down with a group of high school students for an early morning Bible study. This is a study that our Student Ministries Director, Blake Britt, started a couple of months ago. Students meet up at the Aledo Diner at 7:15 a.m. each Tuesday morning, enjoy a good breakfast and delve into Scripture together. Blake was out of town Tuesday doing some advance work in Oklahoma for the Senior High Mission Trip, so he asked me to stand in for him.

In this particular study, the students have been making their way through the New Testament letter 1 Peter. It covers a broad range of practices for living as a follower of Jesus Christ and within a community of Disciples. Peter touches a lot on the theme of suffering, since many of those early followers of Jesus lived under the constant threat of persecution.

But on Tuesday, something else caught my eye. In the fourth chapter, introducing a section that discusses how followers of Christ are to interact with each other and use the gifts with which God has blessed them, Peter says this: *The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers.*

The end of all things is near. It's the context of Peter's whole discussion, and without it, a crucial element in understanding where Peter is coming from is missing. You see Peter – along with the Apostle Paul and many of the first-century followers of Jesus – believed they were living on borrowed time. They believed decisively that Jesus soon would return for the final time and that the world as they knew it would be over. What that world would look like they really didn't know. They just knew everything would change.

And by soon, I really mean soon. They were convinced that Christ's return – the Greek word is *Parousia* – was going to happen within their lifetime. And being convinced of that affected the way they lived out their faith.

When you read the letters in the New Testament and the Book of Acts, there is a sense of urgency that is easy to discern. Those early followers of Jesus believed they were living in the End Times, and they wanted to make sure they got this whole discipleship thing right. And it is that urgency that made following Jesus such a radical reimagining of a life of faith. To live in community and harmony with people who historically had been your enemies. To suspend your natural desire to provide a better life for you and your family, and instead give everything to be used in common by the community. To stand firm in proclaiming Christ crucified and risen, even with the knowledge that it could cost you your life.

Not exactly safe, mainstream faith practices, right? And yet that urgency made such radical expression normative among those early followers of The Way. And those radical followers? They changed the world in the name of Jesus Christ.

So the food for thought is this: What might a sense of urgency do to your faith life? What could a greater sense of urgency do to the life and ministries of our church?

They are questions that represent not just an academic exercise. Because in a few weeks, you will have the final report from the *As For Me & My House* visioning process. It will consist of observations and recommendations, all of which stem from the Holy Conversations that we have been having since last fall. And once that report is shared and prayerfully embraced by the congregation, it will be time to get to work. And we have no time to waste.

Maybe, just maybe, we'll find a bit of the radical heart that drove our ancestors in faith. Look at what they did; imagine what we can do.

See you Sunday.