

The Road Less Traveled – February 10, 2017

Someone asked me the other day why I have not preached about President Trump's controversial "travel ban," the executive order that suspends the U.S. refugee program and restricts entry to people from a seven Middle Eastern countries. This person had seen other pastors blogging on this issue or weighing in on Facebook. You may have even seen that the five Texas United Methodist bishops issued a public statement.

Didn't I feel, this person wanted to know, a responsibility to take a stand, to present the proper Christian response to the Trump Administration's order? In short, my answer was no. Because I'm not sure there is a "proper" Christian response. In fact, I think to suggest there is a proper Christian response is divisive and dangerous.

To be sure, there is a "proper" Christian response to a handful of issues. I visited with our Confirmation class the other day, and we talked about what the Bible says about slavery and how our thinking as people of faith has evolved since biblical times. Slavery is wrong, morally reprehensible and indefensible. That's the proper Christian response. No follower of Jesus, I believe, could legitimately argue otherwise. Racism is wrong. Human trafficking and forced prostitution is wrong. And so on.

Those are black and white issues because they are purely moral issues. They are issues that speak directly to a person's humanity and their sacred worth as a child of God. People may try to politicize them, but they are not political issues.

Most other issues that divide us, however, are not purely moral issues. Whether I am a Republican or a Democrat, a conservative or a liberal or somewhere in between, those are not moral or religious questions and certainly not absolutes. Where I come down on immigration or healthcare is not a moral absolute. There is a moral aspect to how I form my opinion – or at least there should be – but it's not simply a question of moral vs. immoral.

Where we get into trouble as a people of faith is when we begin suggesting that our faith demands that we take one position or another. That if we *really* were followers of Jesus, then we believe *this*, interpret current events *that way*, draw the line in the sand *here* or vote for *this person*. Unfortunately I am hearing that way too often of late.

The truth is that in relatively few instances does our faith give us an absolute answer. Instead our faith provides us with a lens through which to examine and reflect on the issues of our day. And I stress the word reflect, because these are not simple issues that face us. They are complicated questions with layer upon layer of implications that reach far beyond the immediate debate. I believe it is through the lens of faith, through the eyes of Jesus, that we are called to reflect.

Does that mean that every Christian will arrive at the same answer at the same time? Hardly. And that's part of the reason we are so divided as a nation right now. Our national psyche has evolved in such a way that it's not enough that I believe something and believe I am right. It's that if you don't believe what I believe, then you must be an unthinking, unfeeling person of no faith.

Our faith in and decision to follow Jesus Christ doesn't form our opinions – it forms us. Jesus spent his life ministering to – loving – those who disagreed with him. Because he knew that, in the end, there was inherent value in the conversation. Some came around to his way of thinking. Many never did. But together they sought after the heart of God and strove to discern what a life devoted to God really looked like. That ongoing conversation, that's how we grow in faith.

Sadly, believing there is but one answer ends the conversation.

See you Sunday.