

The Road Less Traveled – February 2, 2018

Like many of you, I suspect, I spent Tuesday evening watching President Trump's first State of the Union address. It's an old habit that dates back to my teen-age years. I have always been a political junkie, of sorts. But when I was in high school, my Government teacher assigned the class to watch then-President Reagan's State of the Union address and write a brief paper on it. I was hooked. I was fascinated by the opportunity the Constitutionally required report gave the President to cast a vision and rally the American people around his cause. I think I have watched pretty much every State of the Union since, regardless of who was in the White House.

I was especially interested to watch President Trump's address. The State of the Union is traditionally a venue for great oratory, and let's face it, President Trump is not a particularly gifted orator. Not all presidents are. But Donald Trump is more off-the-cuff and plainspoken than any other president in my lifetime.

But what really fascinated me Tuesday night was not the quality of the speech nor the content – I knew that pundits from both sides of the political spectrum would be analyzing that in practically real time. What fascinated me was the voice. Not the President's audible voice, but rather the style in which the speech was delivered. The phrasing. The cadence. The tone. It was Donald Trump. Or to put it another way, the President sounded like Donald Trump.

That may sound like stating the obvious, but not so much. Because Donald Trump did not write the speech. Certainly he had input, but someone else wrote it – probably a team of speech writers. That's nothing new. Presidents don't write their own speeches; they have a staff that does that. And the trick is writing a speech that sounds like the person who is delivering it.

When you think about it, that's a pretty tall order. We all have our particular speaking style. Phrases we like to use. Specific ways we like to pause to make a point. How we put our words together. I suspect if I delivered a sermon on Sunday morning that was written by someone else, you would know immediately that something was amiss. And yet President Trump spoke for more than an hour Tuesday evening, and he sounded like Donald Trump all the way through.

That is a gifted speech writer. Gifted because he or she knows that for a speech to be effective, it has to capture the voice of the person delivering it. Otherwise it will sound like someone else's words, and the message will be lost.

That truth also lies at the heart of evangelism. That's a word that we don't like to use very often because the truth is it scares many of us. It makes us uncomfortable to think about sitting down with a stranger – or worse yet a friend – and saying, "let me tell you about Jesus." I think our greatest fear is that they are going to start asking us biblical questions

that we can't answer or wade into theological waters that are over our head. If we get out of our comfort zone, how does that help build the Kingdom of God?

That fear is unfortunate, and it is born out of an antiquated ideal of evangelism. That somehow we have to emerge from a conversation about Jesus with the listener convinced and on his knees praying the prayer of salvation. But it's a reasonable fear because we have been conditioned to think about evangelism through someone else's voice. Maybe the voice of a Christian author or a pastor, or even one of the Gospel writers or the Apostle Paul. We're trying to use someone else's voice to convey our own message, and it doesn't work.

Evangelism isn't about claiming another soul for Jesus. It's about sharing our story and then giving Jesus room to work. Evangelism isn't about saying, "let me tell you about Jesus." It's about saying, "let me tell you about my Jesus. Let me tell you about how I have experienced Christ. Let me tell you about how Jesus has changed my life."

That's your story. And you have the voice to tell it in a powerful way. It's only through your voice that a Passion for Christ can be communicated in a real way to someone else. So put away the Bible or the checklist of salvation that you found in a book. And find your voice. Tell your story. And watch God begin to move.

See you Sunday.