

The Road Less Traveled – November 10, 2017

A few days ago, during our regular weekly meeting, the staff discussed the shootings at the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs. And inevitably the discussion moved toward what we would do. We talked about whether we should have someone designated to be in the Narthex during services each Sunday, what sort of action plan we could institute in the case of an active shooter, and so on. Frankly, when I got into ministry, I never dreamed I would have to worry about things like that. These days it seems irresponsible not to.

So we will. I will be sitting down with the Trustees to explore what we can do to ensure the safety of everyone who walks through our doors, whether it be on a Sunday or other times. But I found myself struck by the irony of it all. On Sunday, as we were talking about how we live into the vision for our church – to Cultivate a Passion for Christ – our brothers and sisters in Sutherland Springs were coming face to face with evil that is difficult for me to fathom. The struggle between good and evil became all too real. Not theological or philosophical, but life and death real. It was different, more shocking, because of where and when it happened. But the truth is that in the end, it was one more tragic event in an alarming series of tragic events.

And as I prayed for the victims and their families Sunday evening, I also found myself praying for our church. Not for God to keep us safe. Honestly, my mind did not go there. I prayed for God to keep us focused. Because I can't think of a more important time for us to have a clear vision and work relentlessly to live into it.

And here's why. Because this is going to happen again. It grieves me to believe it, but I am convinced. No more are random acts of violence rare occurrences. Instead, they are becoming more commonplace. I heard something shocking on the radio earlier this week. Remember Columbine? In 1999 two students walked into Columbine High School in Littleton, CO, and began shooting. By the time it was over, 13 people had been killed and 24 more injured. It was an act of violence that shocked the nation to its core. And as of Sunday, Columbine is no longer even on the list of the 10 deadliest shootings in the United States. In fact, two of the massacres on that are on that list occurred in the past six weeks.

It's becoming part of our culture. And it will undoubtedly happen again. And when it does, we will again pray for victims, thankful that the violence did not touch someone we love. We will again pray for peace. Will again pray for an end to the cultural realities that coalesce to drive someone to take the lives of others. And we will again ask our questions. Why does this happen? How are we to respond? Where is God in the midst of it all?

And when we ask those questions, we are turning to our faith. We are asking questions to which there are no real answers. But we ask the questions because it is in asking the questions that we seek God. In the questions, we yearn for Christ. And we will talk about things like peace and love and hope. And it is only through Christ that those things become real in the face of evil.

There has never been a more important time to be serious about and authentic in our faith. Because this is when faith has to be real. And empty faith delivers empty promises. Real faith fills our lives with the only promise that matters. That's why a passion for Christ is important. And that's why we will continue to pursue it – relentlessly.

See you Sunday.