

The Road Less Traveled – October 21, 2016

One of the things we often are guilty of in the church is using “churchy” language. It’s insider talk, words and phrases that would be wholly unfamiliar to someone stepping into church for the first time. Unfortunately, we also sometimes use language that is largely unfamiliar even to those who are a part of the community. Words like blessing, grace, exalt, discipleship and even worship. We sort of know what they mean, but when pressed, we have a hard time really articulating exactly what we mean and, more important, what those ideas look like when lived out in a life of faith.

Discernment is another one of those words.

You’ve heard that word a lot in the past few weeks. As we have prepared to embark on the visioning process that we are calling *As For Me & My House*, we’ve talked a lot about discernment. Indeed discernment is the driving force, the whole point behind this process. It’s about discerning who we are and who and where God is calling us to be as a congregation moving into the future. It is a very deliberate process, and one that no doubt feels awkward. It feels awkward because we aren’t used to it. It’s not the way we usually do things.

Most of the time we think of discernment as nothing more than making a choice between multiple options. Should I choose option 1 or option 2? Should we go to Hawaii for vacation, or would a Caribbean cruise work better for us? Should I choose this college or that one? It’s about looking at pros and cons, cost vs. benefit and making an informed decision. The truth is that we weigh options and make choices every day. So it’s not surprising that when we come together as a church and try to figure out where we need to be headed and how best to get there, we utilize the same strategy. Most often we come together, either as a congregation or as a smaller group, we look at what we want to accomplish and then we find the best path to accomplish it. Sometimes we call it strategic planning, but the process is the same.

The problem is that we are many within the body of Christ, and we have differing ideas of where we think the church should go, who we should be as a community and, ultimately, where we should be focusing our attention and resources. And so oftentimes one of two things happen. Either the one who is the loudest and most persistent sets the agenda and the direction, or we get stuck in the process and nothing ever really happens.

Discernment, however, is a different process altogether. It’s different because it isn’t about choosing the best path or weighing two equally viable choices, it’s about deciding between truth and error, right and wrong. Discernment is the process of making careful distinctions in our thinking about truth. In other words, the ability to think with discernment is synonymous with an ability to think biblically and theologically.

Or to put it another way, deciding is about doing what’s best for us. Discerning is about doing what’s best for God and the unfolding of God’s Kingdom. To do that, we have to know what it is that God wants from us, what God dreams of for us.

And that requires time. It requires that we take the time – before we start planning – to listen. To open ourselves to the movement of the Holy Spirit and the presence of God in our midst. To reflect on where God has brought us to this point. To reflect on who we are and then who God is calling us to be.

That is the purpose of *As For Me & My House*. It feels awkward, I know. We want to get together, plan for the future, and get on with it. That’s the way most of us operate, myself included. But if we believe that we are here because God calls us to be here, that we exist as a church to love and serve God and to equip people to be disciples of Jesus Christ, then surely we must begin with God and God’s plan for us.

That is the journey that we have begun. And I pray that you will join me in embracing it, awkwardness and all. I promise you we will get to the planning stage. And when we do we will be prepared to act boldly and decisively. But I also want us to act faithfully, not simply doing what’s best for us, but doing what best allows us to fulfill our mission as the Body of Christ.

See you Sunday.