

The Road Less Traveled – June 5, 2020

I haven't said anything because I did not know what to say. I found myself wanting to speak, but the words eluded me.

For the past week as the nation has struggled to absorb the reality of the death of George Floyd while in the custody of Minneapolis Police, as we have grappled with the rage and despair that has gripped our communities and the violence that it has spawned, I found myself simply grieving, unable to articulate anything that I thought would help.

I found myself thinking of a conversation I had with my older son probably 20 years ago. I was away on a business trip, and Andrew, in the first grade at the time, was describing for me when I called home that evening what he had learned about Martin Luther King that day in school. He talked about not judging people by the color of their skin, but then said he didn't really understand what that meant. And so I reminded him about his friend whose skin was a different color than his. Andrew was quiet for a moment and then simply said, "Oh." That's when it hit me that he had never noticed.

And that night I was convinced that my children would be the first generation who would grow up in a world where race would not be an issue. I have sadly come to understand how wrong I was. Race is as much an issue today than it has been at any time since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Race continues to define us in far too many ways. In some ways I think things are worse than they were in the 1960s because the issues are still there, but far more people believe they aren't issues any more.

And so as a pastor – and more importantly as a white man – what can I say? I can say that I deplore racism, and yet I confess that I still see color. I do my best to move past that to the person, but I often see color first. And I am ashamed.

I can say that I often find myself resenting having to answer for crimes of the past, and yet I cannot deny that past is the starting point for the systemic racism and bigotry that continues plague us to this day.

I can say that America is the land of opportunity and that all men are created equal. But the reality is that all persons are created equal by God, but people of color – particularly African-Americans – are born with a cultural burden in this country that I cannot begin to comprehend.

I can say that I want to be part of the solution, not the problem, but I honestly don't know where to begin.

And yet maybe it's here, with this painful confession. That all of my desire for a society that is color-blind stems from a desire to avoid the issues that are really

important. That it is easier for me as a white man to simply encourage my black brothers and sisters to leave the past behind and focus on the future. Except when the past is never acknowledged, the past is destined to repeat itself.

Perhaps it starts the way it did Monday night in downtown Fort Worth. Protesters gathered at the Courthouse, and police in riot gear gathered across from them, ready to put down any violence. Things got tense. And then one police officer stepped forward out of the line, approached the protesters, and knelt in prayer. Another followed, and several more after that. But they didn't just pray. They listened. They listened to the pain. To the rage. To the fear. And what could have been an ugly situation was defused.

I think that may be where we begin. Because those officers did the most honest, human thing they could have done. They admitted in a moment of confrontation that they did not understand. They couldn't understand. But they *wanted* to.

And that's a start. An honest admission that white America doesn't have the context or the experience to understand the rage that African-Americans feel. But what we can do is listen. What we can do is stop encouraging our brothers and sisters to leave the past behind. What we can do is stop denying the past of which we are all deeply ashamed. And we can stop thinking that the real problem is the protests.

And instead of arguing, we can begin to try to understand. Not to offer a solution, but rather to find understanding. If you are white, I initially was going to encourage you to ask our brothers and sisters of color to help us understand. But it was pointed out to me that our brothers and sisters are tired of trying to explain that which has defined their lives, as well as the lives of their parents and grandparents. Instead, I will try to educate myself before attempting to join the conversation, a real attempt to hear the voices of my brothers and sisters of color without making them educate me. If you would like to join me, I lift up the following article and video as starting points. They are mere starting points, of course, but every journey has a beginning, and these will beckon you – perhaps uncomfortably – into the raw emotion of the reality in which our brothers and sisters of color live.

They are:

[Article](#)

[Video](#)