

## **The Road Less Traveled - June 12, 2020**

What a difference a week makes. Last Saturday I was marching through the streets of Aledo standing with strangers. Today I am preparing to meet my granddaughters for the first time. Those two events may not seem connected, but they will be forever joined in my mind.

Many of you know that for the past year or so my son and daughter-in-law have been working toward adopting a group of siblings through the Foster Care program. It has been a long and arduous process, as it certainly should be. After all, the stakes could not be higher, finding the right home, the right family for children who, even at a young age, already have suffered in ways that most of us cannot even imagine.

And I think that's the key. Most of us cannot even imagine.

It has been an interesting journey for Melissa and I, but nothing compared to the journey that Andrew and Marianne have traversed. They have dealt with a variety of highly personal and downright insensitive questions. Why in the world would you want to do this? Don't you want to have children of your own? How long did you try to have kids before you decided to adopt? What happened to these kids' parents?

We have heard most of those questions. I'm sure Andrew and Marianne have heard them all, and then some. For the most part we try to smile and deflect because I know that most people mean well. I tell them that we know only that Andrew and Marianne have been talking about adopting since long before they were married. For them it is a calling, to open their home to children who desperately need a home and a family. And it is a calling from which they have never wavered. We tell folks that these three girls are "their own" children and will forever be the ones who made Melissa and I grandparents. When Andrew and Marianne were with them last weekend, they sent us a video in which the girls all said hello to us. When I heard my grandpa name – "Papa T" – come out of those little girls' mouths, I knew it didn't get any better than that.

But it is with the last question that I most struggle. What happened to these kids? What happened with their parents that they ended up in foster care? And the answer is that we don't know. Andrew and Marianne know, but they have decided that is information that does not need to be shared. And I think that is wise.

And so, the reality is that we will never know, and consequently, we will never understand what these girls have been through. Even if we knew, we couldn't possibly understand. Instead we will merely surround them with love. We will listen intently to the stories they choose to tell us. And we will simply be there for

them, to support them, and to help create a new future for them. And Melissa and I, as parents, will be proud that our son and daughter-in-law felt called to be part of the salve that soothes a hurting world.

I had much the same reaction as I marched from the high school toward the Aledo traffic circle Saturday evening. I didn't really know what to expect when Emma and I went to the march. We simply both felt called to go. Some of the comments on social media in advance of the march were so provocative and anger-filled that they prompted me to leave those particular groups. What we found when we arrived and throughout the march, however, made me very proud of this community. There was no trouble. There was no thought of rioting or damaging property. There were no hateful comments toward law enforcement officers. Instead there was a celebratory aspect to it.

We weren't celebrating the terrible events that have prompted Black Lives Matter demonstrations across the country over the past couple of weeks. But we were celebrating that such a diverse group of people – male, female; young, old; black, white, brown – that we all came together to proclaim in one voice that black lives matter. Not to suggest – as some have argued – that all lives do not matter. But to affirm for our black brothers and sisters that their lives do matter in the face of a past and all-to-often present that would suggest otherwise.

And as we stood in the high school parking lot – several hundred of us – preparing to march, the one thing we all agreed on is that we don't understand. I think part of the problem is that for too long White America has tried to say we understand. We don't. We can't. We don't have the history. We don't have the context. And I think that maybe the first step in healing the racial divisions in this country is admitting that. I don't understand.

I don't understand, but I will stand with you, because I know you are hurting. I don't understand, but I will choose to love you because you are my brother, my sister. I don't understand, but I will listen as you tell me your story. I don't understand, but I will acknowledge my own role and my own complicity in the arena of privilege. I don't understand, but I will choose to be a part of the solution because it hurts me to see you hurt.

Because I want someday for someone to be able to say about me, he was part of the salve that soothed a hurting world. Surely that's what Jesus calls us to be.