

The Road Less Traveled – September 14, 2018

As a man, sometimes the hardest thing to do is simply to listen. I'm convinced that it goes against our nature. Men are hard-wired to be fixers, problem solvers. Give us a problem, and we'll quickly give you three possible solutions, neatly ordered from the most expedient to the least. To simply listen as someone we love pours out their heart? Well, it simply feels like we aren't doing our job.

And yet, to simply listen is often what those we love need from us the most. They no doubt can figure out solutions to the problems that they face. They can make lists of pros and cons, advantages and disadvantages. They can weigh their options and decide upon an acceptable course of action. What they need most from us is our ear. And when they get it, they know they are loved.

I think it's because listening means attention. When you stop and simply listen, you are holding yourself in the present with the one you love. You aren't mentally rummaging through future decisions and their effects. You are anchored solidly in the present moment. And in that moment, that attention allows you to feel what someone else feels, hurt as they hurt, fear as they fear. Maybe that's what makes it so hard.

And maybe that's what makes listening the holiest thing we do with the ones we love. The Psalmist cries out, "I call upon you, O Lord; come quickly to me; give ear to my voice when I call to you. He cries out to his God not for solutions, but simply to hear his voice as he calls. The Psalmist simply wants to be heard.

And in the end, that's what God promises. God promises not a life free from suffering or hardship. God promises not a life free from grief or difficulty. And God promises not a list of divine solutions, neatly ordered from the most expedient to the least. God simply promises presence. God promises that in the darkest of times, those times when we feel most alone, that we are not. And God promises that when we cry out to our Creator, our Creator always loves us enough to listen.

Not a bad lesson for all of us.