

## **The Road Less Traveled – March 1, 2019**

By now many if not most of you are aware of the vote at General Conference this week regarding the United Methodist Church's official stance on same-gender relationships. The Church, led largely by delegates from outside the United States, voted to affirm and even strengthen the denomination's stance that the practice of homosexuality is contrary to Christian teaching.

For those holding an Orthodox view of Christianity, it represented a victory. And some of you have taken to social media to proclaim it as such. And if you hold that position, I want you to know that I totally respect your views. I have many friends and colleagues who I have come to know as mighty women and men of God who hold tight to those same values. But I want today to offer an alternative view. One that I have come to know over the past weeks and months.

In this time I have been in conversation with people in our church for whom this doctrinal debate has been intensely personal. People who are in same-gender relationships or who have children who are gay. For them this is not an academic exercise, but a very real determination about who they are or who their children are in the eyes of God. Does God value them as human beings in the same way that God views the rest of us? For many in our congregation, simply having to pose that question is intensely hurtful.

I spent much of the day Wednesday in conversation with many of those people. And their pain is real and it is raw. They love Aledo United Methodist Church and the relationships they have here. But at the same time they are struggling with a worldwide denomination that tells them that they or their children are somehow less in the eyes of God.

I struggled with this issue for many years. I know that many say that the Bible is very clear on this issue. And I believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God. But I also know that there are many parts of the Bible that we choose to reinterpret in light of the changing culture in which we live. Slavery. Polygamy. Divorce. We have come to understand over time that we have changed in our understanding of what is God's will. We have come to understand that the Bible was written in a time of context, and that our context has changed over the generations.

Slavery is wrong. I think we all agree on that. A man having multiple wives is wrong as well. Executing a person for growing different crops together or wearing two different types of fabric is wrong as well. And we have evolved as a people of faith to come to that understanding.

This week's vote by the General Conference was a victory for those who hold a traditional view of how we interpret Scripture, there is no doubt. But, friends, let us not forget the people who are deeply affected and hurt by this decision. Let us, as a faith family, embrace

them and let them know that we are with them in their hurt and confusion. Let them know that THIS community of faith affirms their sacred worth as builders of God's Kingdom.

Since my arrival at Aledo UMC, I have been blessed to come to know many women and men who I know are suffering right now. They are not heretics. They are not people who have gone off the reservation. They are mighty women and men of God who want nothing more than to serve God, follow Christ and be a part of the Kingdom that is unfolding. They are hurting right now. They are wondering if their church values them as sacred children of God.

Regardless of your theological bent, I hope you will join with me in expressing a resounding yes. Yes, you are a treasured child of God. Yes, you are of sacred worth. And yes, you are my brother and sister in Christ, with whom I am grateful to be in ministry.

See you Sunday.