

The Road Less Traveled – April 6, 2018

It's a phenomenon that I have never fully understood – the post-Easter slump. Traditionally the Sunday after Easter is one of the lowest attended Sundays in the church year. Scores of pastors take the Sunday off, so many that the Sunday after Easter is affectionately dubbed National Associates Sunday. And they don't take off because they are still tired from Easter. They take off because they don't want to preach to a half-empty Sanctuary.

And I've never understood it. In the aftermath of Easter, I am excited. God has just revealed again the mystery of the Empty Tomb. We have just been reminded of just how deep the Father's love is for us. The truth that there was literally nothing God did not do to demonstrate that love hits hard. And at the end of the Easter story, we are encouraged – challenged really – to make that love real. To live as people loved that much by their creator. I leave Easter inspired, emboldened and encouraged to recommit myself to the life of discipleship that Jesus offers.

After the excitement of Easter, I can't wait to worship again. I am anxious to step out on the journey with Jesus again.

And I hope you are, too. I can't explain the phenomenon of the post-Easter slump, I just know that it happens. But I also am convinced that it doesn't have to. On Easter we explored together the underlying message of the Empty Tomb. We talked about how God's redemption of the events of Holy Week articulate a promise to us of God's redemption of the darkest times of our own lives. There is a promise of presence there, and we tend to see what we expect to see. As followers of a risen Lord, we should expect to see Christ at work in our midst. We should expect to hear the call to step into the holy work that God is blessing.

In other words, this is not a time to slack off. This is a time to dig in. This is time to fully commit ourselves to the journey of faith that begins anew at that Empty Tomb. The truth is we can't afford a post-Easter slump. There's too much to do.

- On Sunday, we will celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Baptism and we will do it in a couple of different ways. At the 11 a.m. service we will claim God's grace on behalf of Emmilynn Christiansen, and we'll celebrate with her parents, Ian and Angie as we as a faith family come alongside a precious child in her faith journey. Earlier, at the 9 a.m. service, we're doing something new and special. It will look like a baptism, but it's not. One of our Confirmands, Elizabeth O'Donald, will remember and affirm the baptismal vows her parents made for her when she was an infant. We haven't done this before, at least during my time at Aledo UMC. But it is a wonderful way for someone to feel more a part of a baptismal event that he or she does not remember. And it is a sacred moment that is available to anyone.

- The following Saturday, on April 14, our 15 Confirmands will head off to Glen Lake Camp for their Confirmation Retreat. While we are there, one of our Confirmands will be baptized in the lake at Glen Lake Camp, and another one of our students will reaffirm her baptism in the same manner. That will happen at 3 p.m. on Saturday, and everyone from our church is invited to be there.
- Then on Sunday, April 15, we will honor and celebrate along with those 15 Confirmands and their families a huge step in their personal faith journeys. Confirmation represents these students' "yes" to the grace, love and Lordship of Jesus Christ that their parents claimed for them at their baptisms. In saying yes to Christ, these students not only claim that faith for themselves, they also become full professing members of this faith family. We will confirm these students at the 11 a.m. service that day, and I encourage you to be there. Whenever we baptize a baby, we as a congregation vow to do everything in our power to lead, guide and nurture them in the faith until they are ready to claim it for themselves. We have lived out those vows, and Confirmation Sunday represents the fruit of that work. I pray each person who calls Aledo UMC home will be there to walk these last steps.
- In the coming weeks you'll hear about a potential church-wide mission initiative that I am really excited about. Stay tuned for more details.
- And looking even further into the future, as we move into the summer, opportunities to serve abound. There's Camp Hope in June, Vacation Bible School in July, Junior High and Senior High mission trips, a Young Adult mission trip, etc. Watch your enews or check out the Connection Center before or after worship to explore where God may be calling you to serve.

All that is to say – and it bears repeating – this is not time for slacking. This is the time to dig in and to walk faithfully and passionately the path that leads away from the Empty Tomb. That's what it means to live as the people of Easter.

See you Sunday.