

First and Center
Pastor's Blog
May 8, 2019

I returned yesterday from driving to and from DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana to be present at my youngest son's Junior Vocal Recital and a concert of the college choirs (Mozart *Requiem*). And -- to bring most of his stuff back as he will fly home in ten days! Approximately sixteen hours of driving each way (broken up into a couple of days each way): Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, and Indiana.

This country is so beautiful. Red bud trees blooming everywhere along the way. Fields plowed and planted, or ready to plant; some winter wheat growing. So many colors of dirt!

And of green, as the trees are coming into leaf at different stages. Tulips, early azaleas, dogwood, late cherries all blooming. Hilly land and flat land and rolling land. Cities, small towns, large and small farms spread out across miles of fields. Cows, horses, sheep, deer. Birds of so much variety in size, color, and song.

People various in size, color, accent, dress, and custom, as well. Midwesterners tend to be very nice in public (my northeastern urban-raised daughter once said that all that niceness "creeped her out!") It's kind of lovely to say hi to strangers on the street and have them say hi back.

There were some not nice things, too. Confederate flags prominently displayed on the backs of trucks and cars. Rude drivers. Loud hotel guests. But the lovely so outweighed the other on this particular journey.

One of Alan Paton's books about South Africa is titled *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful*. It was written during and about the struggles of the apartheid-era, and so the title is, of course, wistful. It's how I feel these days about my country. It is so beautiful in so many ways. How is it that we have what seem to be weekly school shootings, domestic violence killings, racial hatred, religious hatred, political hatred? How can such ugly come out of such beauty?

And, more to the point, how can each of us raise up the beauty and put away the hate?



~ The Rev. Shelly Stackhouse, Transitional Minister