

Have you ever been traveling in unfamiliar territory when an accident or construction forced you off the main road... with no road map in the car? I realize that's a question that most folks today would not understand because their cell phone is their roadmap with all the directions they need... unless it was this past Thursday when suddenly folks all over this country found themselves with cell phones and other electronic devices that were useless without being connected to cell towers or the internet. Later that day while many were lamenting on Facebook about not being able to connect and talk with others or transact business... I commented about the good ol' days when people sat on front porches, in Cafes and other places talking about what's going on in their lives, the community and the world...

Most of us can recall those good ol' days without all of today's wireless devices. All of us at one time or another have found ourselves at an intersection of some kind that required us to make a decision as to which direction to travel...

The Road Not Taken – Robert Frost

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

*And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden back,
O, I kept the first for another day!
Yet, knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

*Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as far that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same.*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence;
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

The road less traveled can be a more difficult road... and yet its path may reveal to us many wondrous views and opportunities. The less traveled road may offer experiences that are filled with excitement and unexpected pleasures and joys... and it may suddenly plunge its traveler into unexpected darkness, pain and sorrow. Leaving the well worn path opens up new possibilities... around the next bend and over the next hill of life's path.

Jesus speaks of a road in today's gospel that Peter does not want to travel. Jesus tells the disciples what is coming down the road in his ministry – that he must suffer many things, be rejected by all the religious rulers, die and then rise on the third day. This leaves the disciples most perplexed... with the often impetuous Peter letting Jesus know what he thinks about the road Jesus is choosing.

Jesus' preview of the upcoming less traveled road of suffering and dying on a cross does not sound like "Good News"! This less traveled road with a cross as its destination is repulsive and to be avoided at all costs. How Jesus can teach such a theology and be a part of it is beyond their comprehension.

And so Peter says enough and stops Jesus in his tracks – saying this can't be right! Peter does not understand how God could possibly want Jesus... and them to travel such a path of sorrow, pain, and death. Peter is convinced Jesus is choosing the wrong path, for from his perspective it does not lead to the success, power and glory that he envisions the Messiah bringing into the world, including freedom from Rome.

In Walt Wangerin's novelization of the Bible, which he titled: "***The Book of God***", Walt develops Biblical accounts and explores its characters to examine their motives, feelings and relationships. He masterfully writes and speaks about Biblical love and conflict, and human and beyond human events that occur throughout the Bible. On pages 706-707 of his book Walt describes today's gospel from Peter's point of view:

"He [Jesus] said, "Things are going to change now." He heaved a sigh. We all were moving with him now toward the little spring of water. He said, "I have to go to Jerusalem. When I get there, I will suffer many things from the elders and the chief priests and the scribes. I'm telling you now so that you need not be surprised when it happens. It will happen."

Jesus knelt down by the spring, cold from the earth. He made a cup of his hands and scooped water. Just before he started to drink, he said, "I will be killed in Jerusalem, and on the third day be raised..."

I spoke again. I said the most natural thing there was to say. Well, my feelings were so hurt by Jesus' words. Be killed? Was this the gloomy thing he'd been thinking about all the time? I grabbed his wrist and shouted, "No!" The water splashed from his hands.

"No, God won't allow it!" I cried. On account of my feelings, I was gripping him with all my strength. But he started to pry my fingers from his wrist. He had terrible power in his hands. I blustered on. Surely he knew that I was arguing out of love for him! "O Lord," I said, "this can never happen to you!"

After Jesus criticizes Peter, Wangerin emphasizes his perspective of Peter's thoughts:

"No, but I do care for the things of God! And I love you, Lord Jesus! This is so confusing. One minute I'm Peter; the next minute I'm Satan, but I didn't change! How can plain love cause such outrage in the Lord?"

Indeed, Peter's love for Jesus left him most perplexed and unable to comprehend why Jesus would choose such a path that is so different from the road they had been traveling the past 3 years — why would he subject himself to such suffering when he

has been healing and restoring so many everywhere they traveled? Why would he now choose a road so different from the one they've been traveling? Why with his past miraculous feeding of thousands, healing of many, restoring sight and sending demons running... would he depart from what seems like a path of success, glory and power to travel a road of unbelievable pain, suffering and even death? That is not the road of a long awaited conquering Messiah. It is the road of a dead one!

Imagine Peter trying to understand Jesus' words... ***"Get behind me, Satan!"*** ... when Jesus turns to all of them and says: ***"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.***

The disciples find themselves at a life intersection that they didn't see coming. Suddenly Jesus calls them to follow him on a road that they don't see inviting at all. They'd like to put up a "Road Closed"...or at least a "Detour" sign at that life intersection. Perhaps it would be appropriate that they put up a sign that says something like: "Road Construction Ahead – Follow Signs" ...*"Follow Jesus"*.

Another analogy of the situation might be of being rescued from an island that you are shipwrecked on... or perhaps your plane crashed on the island. When rescue finally comes; and you pick up your suitcase or backpack , the rescuer says, *"No, you'll have to leave your 'luggage' behind. We only have room for you – nothing else."* You don't like leaving it behind and begin to complain. I guess you could say, *"No, I don't like that option. I'll just stay here."* And maybe Gilligan will stay behind with you on the island...

Jesus' call to follow him on his road to the cross is indeed on a road less traveled – a road that is under construction... with the final destination that can only be reached by a bridge that they cannot yet see beyond the cross that hides their view for 3 days.

It is indeed difficult to give up the tried and true – what can be seen and known for the unseen and the unknown. Jesus' teaching that one must give up everything, including one's very sense of self accomplishment, success and well-being for Jesus' life's plan is a tough decision for them to make. The disciples do have the advantage of having spent the past 3 years with Jesus — with memories of his miraculous healings... and calming the storm when they feared for their lives... but this hits home! It is personal! He's asking them to lose their lives in him... that in so doing they will find their lives.

C. S. Lewis puts it this way, *"Christ says: give me all. I don't want only so much of your time or money or work, I want you. No half-measures are good enough. Hand over the whole self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as theories you think wicked – the whole outfit. And I will give you a new self instead,"*

Jesus asks us to lose our lives in him and in so doing he will give us a new life. Our mortal minds work overtime seeking answers – wanting to know more about just what kind of "new life" we will get? Over the years many have tried to paint a more rosy

picture of that life... many have tried to level and pave the “less traveled road” to make it more comfortable...and/or they’ve provided “vehicles” with wonderful suspensions that smooth out life’s bumps and ruts... and still others proclaim, “When you get right with God...your new life will be better than your previous life... even glorious.”

The way many proclaim the “Good News” today would be pleasing to Peter and the disciples; for all too many sell the “Road Less Traveled” as one with panoramic views where God has only blessings in store for us — success without suffering, and promise without pain. It is a road with tour guides who say: “Believe in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior... and all you’ve ever dreamed of will be yours.”

If Jesus were to walk in on their preaching and teaching, I have little doubt that these preachers of a painless gospel... would experience Jesus face to face as Peter did: **“Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”** And imagine the response of all those gathered and listening there... when they not only hear Jesus’ words echoing across the sanctuary, but his words also “miraculously” appear on the church’s screens and TVs!

Yes, we all have a bit of Peter in us – a part of us that desires to negotiate our terms for both the “Road Less Traveled” and just what is involved in receiving and living this “new life” that Jesus offers. How often do we think, “I’ll just stay here with Gilligan... or I just want to keep this small piece from my old life’s luggage...” We all long to enjoy life without rough roads and construction; however, they are integral parts of life in this world – on this side of eternity. And Jesus calls each of us to be a part of his construction crews that faithfully help others along life’s paths – along both well traveled and less traveled roads. Just as construction workers, patrolmen and first responders spend tiring days in the hot sun as well as days and nights in freezing temperatures... so to we will encounter times of self sacrifice, of giving to others, of putting our needs second to the needs of others suffering along this world’s roadways.

Living for Christ and in Christ does not mean that everything will be without pain and suffering. Crosses can be heavy, awkward and far from glorious; but as we faithfully follow and walk with Jesus along life’s roadways... we will one day cross his bridge to eternal life. It is in faithfully living by the cross, in the cross and through the cross that we experience Jesus’ true meaning and purpose in our life.

Which road have you chosen... are you traveling today? The road that Peter first wanted to take, or the road that Jesus teaches and calls us to travel...with him?

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I --
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

Amen.