



# Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina  
Jody C. Wright, Senior Minister

APRIL 30, 2017  
THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

## The Road Most Taken I Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35

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

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

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

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.<sup>1</sup>

I have always liked this poem and always imagined that I was or would be a person who would take the path “less traveled by” off the main road. Occasionally I have, but for the most part, I tend to keep to the main road in life, the one you and most people I know travel. Certainly there are detours here and there, sometimes a jaunt onto a street that is interesting or curious or compelling, but most of the time, most of us stay on the road most taken.

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Frost, “The Road Not Taken,” 1915.

That is what two of the disciples were doing late in the afternoon of that first Easter day. Listen to their story:

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?"

They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him."

Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.

They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread. Luke 24:13-35

These two fellows were on the way home after an emotional, tiring, and frustrating weekend. As they walked down the familiar road back to Emmaus, they talked together about everything that had happened—the arrest in the garden, the mock trial, the beating and abuse of Jesus, the trek out to the place of the Skull, Jesus’ death and burial, and the reports of some of the women that Jesus was alive. They were sad. Jeffrey Gallagher has likened their mood to:

The Cleveland Indians’ locker room after a ten-inning game seven. Hillary Clinton’s campaign headquarters early on November 9. The emergency room after an unsuccessful tracheotomy. A quiet office after a pink slip is found on the desk. A lonely bathroom where a plus sign just won’t appear on a pregnancy test.<sup>2</sup>

Luke tells us that they were walking home and they were sad. They had lost. The game was over. There was nothing to do but head home . . . on the road most taken.

The road most taken is the one we walk every day of our lives. It is our routine, our comfort zone, our safe place. It is the bowl of cereal, the muffin, the cup of coffee or whatever is the latest drink du jour. It is the keys hanging where you put them, the neighbor who waves each day, the stoplight that always catches you, the parking spot that is “yours.” The road most taken is the route from one class to another, the lunchroom table where you sit with your friends, the numbers that are programmed into your phone.

The road most taken is the favorite chair that is conformed to your body alone, the familiar programs on TV, the newspaper that feels right in your

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<sup>2</sup>Jeffrey M. Gallagher, "Living the Word: Reflections on the Lectionary: April 30, Third Sunday of Easter, Luke 24:13–35," *The Christian Century* (April 12, 2017): 20; available online at: <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/april-30-third-sunday-easter>.

hands, the call that comes at the same time every day to check on you. The road most taken is the people you care about and the people who care about you. The road most taken is what is familiar and common. It is what works for us. So, when we are feeling lost or hurt or uncertain, we take the road we most often travel. It is the only way we can get around.

The story of Cleopas and his friend is a puzzling story in many respects. As they are walking and talking about what has happened, a stranger appears who happens to be Jesus, although they are prevented from recognizing him. He interprets his own life as a fulfillment of scripture and when he pretends that he is going to continue on his way, the two friends do the hospitable thing and invite him to have supper and stay the night. Finally, when Jesus, acting as the host in someone else's home, blesses and breaks the bread, simple things he had done dozens of times in their sight, their eyes are opened, they recognize him and he vanishes.

These are odd events, to be sure. Yet, haven't we had things happen to us at just the right moment when we needed them most? A friend calls unexpectedly when we need to hear an encouraging voice. An old picture surfaces that reminds us of a good time enjoyed long ago. A job offer comes out of the blue after we have searched diligently for work for months. We do something fun and discover that it is okay to enjoy life again without feeling guilty.

A couple of days after my mother died, we were trying to figure out if Robert would be able to fly home from Slovakia to be with us for the funeral., but it became evident that he would not be able to come. As I walked into my parents' kitchen, I noticed the light on their ancient answering machine was flashing. There were twenty-five messages on the machine which they hardly ever checked. I began listening and discovered that some of the messages were indeed old—well over a year. Then I realized that one of the messages was actually a recording of a phone conversation, one of those times when the machine begins recording before we get to the phone. What I heard was a phone call between Robert and my mother that had taken place last year on her birthday! What a gift for him when he could not be with us! What a gift for us all! I was walking toward Emmaus, doing routine things around the house, and God suddenly appeared.

Did God cause that particular conversation to be recorded and not erased a year ago? I don't know. Was it a gift that it was there and other calls prompted me to listen? Absolutely! Do I think God was in it all

somehow? I do. And you know of many instances when God has slipped into your lives and provided exactly what you needed at the moment. I think those gifts are discovered on the road most taken, in the familiar places we go and things that we do. God has a way of making himself known at just the right moment whether that is in a stable in first century Palestine, at dinner in the humble village of Emmaus, or in a call recorded on an old answering machine. The story of the trip to Emmaus is a story of God breaking into our lives in the most ordinary ways but when we need it most.

The other odd aspect of this story is the fact that the disciples are sad. Even as they tell the incognito Jesus of the reports of the women that he was alive and of the other disciples that the tomb was empty, they are sad. We expect them to be excited and enthused about the prospect that their savior is alive. But they are sad. They have heard the rumors, but they have no personal experience to validate the stories.

Let us not be too hard on these fellows. They have been through a traumatic weekend. The person whom they had hoped would redeem Israel was executed and buried. Their world had fallen apart. Their hope had dissipated. Even the reports of the other disciples were not enough to lift their spirits.

We are now two weeks past this year's celebration of Christ's resurrection and around two thousand years past that first Easter. Are there not times when we are sad and hopeless? Are there not days when we feel as if Jesus has not been raised from the dead? Are there not times when we feel like we are on the losing team?

That is why it is important to walk the road most taken. God is often able to catch our attention in the familiar things that we do. God can surprise us when we least expect it. God can slip into the familiar and open our eyes to the wonder of life that has been there all of the time just waiting to be discovered. That is what Jesus did for Cleopas and his friend on the road to Emmaus. That is what Jesus did for the women who visited the tomb, for the men who were huddled in fear in the upper room, and for every believer since who has felt that life has no meaning or purpose. God pops up in familiar places because that is where we feel comfortable and safe. We do not have to ask directions on the road most taken so we can be open to God joining us on our journey.

I discovered an interesting interpretation of Robert Frost's poem, "The Road Not Taken." Apparently Frost wrote it as a joke to his friend and fellow poet Edward Thomas. The two friends frequently took walks together and Thomas would often choose a path which he thought would lead them to an exciting find. When the path did not offer anything glorious, Thomas would lament his choice and wish they had taken the other route. For Frost, the poem was a reminder that each path in life offers similar possibilities and it is only by looking back on our journey that we appreciate what we have discovered along the way.<sup>3</sup>

It was after Jesus revealed himself that the two disciples fully appreciated what he had told them on the road to Emmaus. It was after Jesus' resurrection and subsequent appearances that everything he had done and said came into sharp focus. It is often in looking back that we discover the many times God in Christ has met us on the familiar roads we travel.

The good thing is that Jesus was also walking along the road to Emmaus that evening. He may have also walked along other routes that took him to Emmaus or other villages in the area. He may well have appeared to other believers whom we do not know. He certainly travels the roads that we most often take. May we learn to recognize Jesus in the ordinary things that we do which can lead us to extraordinary moments of communion with God. Whatever path you choose, remember that God in Christ walks it, too. Look for him there. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup>Katherine Robinson, "Poem Guide: Robert Frost: "The Road Not Taken," *Poetry Foundation* (accessed April 29, 2017); available online at: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/resources/learning/core-poems/detail/44272#guide>.

April 30, 2017

## Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

It is difficult for us to believe that we could ever be considered “holy,” O God. We have done so many things that are “unholy” and sinned with such carelessness that we think holiness is far beyond our reach. Yet, you have claimed each of us who believes in you and confesses you as Lord as “holy ones,” saints who follow your way. Truly we are humbled and commit ourselves to find and follow that path which leads us to true holiness in your sight.

We are grateful, O God, that through the sacrifice Christ made for us, the total self-giving that he demonstrated to us, we are made righteous in your eyes. Thank you for loving us into redemption and for calling us to lead lives that bespeak the holy in all that we do and say.

As our journey takes us further and further from the cross and the empty tomb, draw us all the more closer to you, we pray. Continue to woo us with your grace and call us with your Spirit. Keep us close, O God, to protect and guide us as we walk through life.

Today we offer our prayers for people near and far who have needs that are more than we can fulfill. Bless everyone who has once again experienced loss because of flood waters and storms. Take care of all who find themselves in harm’s way because of human devastation due to war, greed, and other forms of violence. Help us to provide food for your children who are hungry, medical care for your children who are ill, comfort to your children who grieve, guidance to your children who are lost and confused, and hope to your children who see no light in the days to come. Take care of us all and enable us to learn to love one another.

Bless us all, O God, with the life-renewing gift of your Spirit. Heal our hearts and minds and mend our souls, we pray. Lead us all to celebrate to new life that is ours through the gift of your Son, our Savior. Amen.