

East Hartford
2 Christmastide

Alice L. O'Donovan
Isaiah 60:1-6, Psa 147, Mt 2:1-12

That Other Road

Listen to these two sacred readings, one almost two thousand years old, the other from 1916, read by the author.

And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. NRSV Mt. 2:12

The Road Not Taken

Use the CD

BY
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 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.*

Both texts speak of roads, in the plural. The respective travelers have options as to route. Only Matthew speaks of a destination, “*they left to return to their own country*” wherever that was. Matthew said only that these men, these scholars came

from the East. Geographic details lie well beyond the intent of the author.

What was Matthew's intent in writing his gospel? We know that he wanted to prove to his primarily Jewish audience, that one Jesus of Nazareth was the long hoped-for Messiah, the Anointed One of God. He clearly wanted to demonstrate that people outside Judaism recognized Jesus as such, and accepted his authority. So, according to Matthew the first people to worship him, were these gentile kings from the east. The last ones to recognize and worship him were the centurion and other Roman soldiers responsible to keep order at the crucifixion as they gasp, "*Truly this was God's Son.*"

But I digress. Back to roads and destinations, "their own country." I believe we stand well within the limits of a faithful understanding this passage if we use that phrase "their own country," to speak about our own country, that is our own being, our own journey of becoming disciples, followers, of Jesus. Our destination in life, as we return to "our own country," is not geographic, not a place nor a direction "to the East" but a life, through which we become Love and lovers. Passionate lovers of God, creation, neighbor, and self.

Truly there are not just two, but many roads to this destination of faithful love and passionate loving. We'll come back to this thought in a moment.

Some questions for you. How often have you come to that place in your life when "two roads diverged,"? Likewise, how often have you come to a time in your life when have needed to leave for your own country *by another road?*

Did high school or college graduation create such a moment? Do you remember wondering what would be next for you? Did you have options? Do you remember making conscious choices, this or that school, this or that job? Marriage, sooner or later? Or did your future seem inevitable, devoid of options?

Do you remember those times when it became clear that you would be doing something different with your life? When your journey took a sharp turn? For example, parenthood puts us in such a place. The death of a relationship or a loved one puts us in such a place, as does a significant illness, or a new opportunity, or other major life events

Have you ever played with new roads, literal roads, going out for a ride, or going on vacation as a wander; leaving home and following one new road after another as it seemed good to you?

When we speak of other roads metaphorically, we often recall some of those “other road” times and opportunities of our lives. As you think back over those moments of divergent roads in your life, when have you traveled the “road less traveled by?” What difference has that made in your life?

I’ve led you through some questions and reflections of your life till this morning, but since we are all breathing our journeys of discipleship, our becoming love and lovers, are obviously not yet complete. There is more. We are still becoming who it is that God dreams we can become, we still on the way to our own country. We’re not done yet! There are still divergent roads ahead of us, other roads to travel back to our own respective countries.

How are we to know which roads to take?

We can hope that God might speak to us in our dreams especially if we are among those folk who actually remember our dreams. There is good biblical precedent and reliable testimony of solid folk that says God does speak through our dreams even in these days and times. While I trust those who testify, that holy speech is not much of my experience.

We can trust that our desire to be and become disciples will guide us. We can trust our “yes” to Jesus’s invitation to walk the paths of love, to follow in his way of love. We know full well that Jesus walked the less traveled paths. He chose friends that were among the low lifes and social discards of his time - the sinners and

tax collectors, the unloved and unloveable. He lived a life of prayer. He practiced the essence of faith and left the trappings, fluff, and hypocrisy of religion behind.

We can trust the cries of the oppressed and the sufferers wherever we hear them, including the cries and the suffering of creation itself. The creatures that die of starvation because we have destroyed the habitat, the now silent cries of the extinct ones because we have wiped them from the face of the earth, the audible cries of those who have been injured while others amassed great wealth from their labors. Think of those who have sickened and died from pesticide poisoning in agriculture, those who died in collapsed or burning factories here and abroad, those who live with asbestiosis or black lung disease. What are the ways to love God's creatures who suffer so that some of God's creatures can have too much?

I could go on, but for this day, it is enough to say, "Trust!"
Let us
 trust our dreams,
 Trust our desire to become Christ's disciple; and
 trust the cries of creation and the suffering around and among
 us,
to lead us to our own country, to lead us into love, via *that other road*, the road less traveled by for that will make all the difference in us.

Amen