

## **TAKING THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED**



**Scripture:**

**Isaiah 60:1-6**

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. <sup>2</sup>For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. <sup>3</sup>Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

<sup>4</sup>Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms. <sup>5</sup>Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. <sup>6</sup>A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.

**Matthew 2:1-12**

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup>asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." <sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup>and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup>They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

<sup>6</sup>And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel."

<sup>7</sup>Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup>Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." <sup>9</sup>When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup>When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. <sup>11</sup>On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup>And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

**This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!**



**THE ROAD NOT TAKEN  
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.

**THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED**

Psychiatrist, F. Scott Peck wrote a book titled *The Road Less Traveled*. It was very popular in the early eighties when I was going through my Masters in Mental Health program at University of California San Francisco. I loved the book because Dr. Peck told stories of his therapy cases and how different events in their lives changed the paths they followed. He also encouraged getting to know oneself. And once one knows oneself, that knowledge enables one to be authentic in life.

He encouraged learning how to follow your own unique path and not trod the path that seems easiest or expected by others. Honesty, grace, and love are forces Peck promotes in the world. But he admitted it takes courage and resilience to brave your own trail and not just follow what is comfortable.

Peck's perspective on love (in *The Road Less Traveled*) is that love is not a *feeling*, it is an *activity* and an *investment*. He defines love as, "The will to extend one's self for the purpose

of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth" (Peck, 1978/1992,<sup>[9]</sup> p85).

**Love is primarily actions towards  
nurturing the spiritual growth  
of another.**

**(Like church.)**

**He recommends being actively loving  
towards others in your life,  
not only to benefit others  
but also to benefit oneself.**

Dr. Peck's inspiration to be authentic and loving to oneself led me to explore going into full-time ministry that combined my healthcare background with theology. The effects of faith on health had been a longtime interest of mine. After twenty-three years working as a psychiatric nurse, I felt led to follow a new divergence in the road without being sure where exactly that road was leading. But at the same time, I felt California calling me back here as well, after being away twenty-six years. And here I am today.

**THREE WISE MEN**

The three wise men went away from Bethlehem by another road. These wise men were truly wise. They paid attention to their dreams, before it was too late. They had an Epiphany, you could say, that Herod was determined to find and destroy the new king who they knew was the truly anointed one of God.

Reverend Tom Long explains it this way. He said, "Many years ago, some wise men living in the Eastern lands of the ancient world, saw an amazing sight in the heavens, the rising of a new star, or maybe it was a comet blazing brightly across the dark curtain of the firmament, and they knew that the rising of this brilliant light was a sign from the heavens, a signal that something momentous, something world-changing, had happened."

He goes on to say, "These wise men were shrewd observers of the night sky, those who looked for signs of decisive events and clues to the future in the heavens. So, Matthew tells us

that just as Jesus was born, they saw this new star rising in the western sky. Using all their powers of analysis and interpretation, they determined that this star was a sign that a new king had been born; ...”

So, the wise men set off on the path they thought was the main road to the palace in Jerusalem. They figured a new king would be born in a palace. But they set out on the path most people would have taken. They took the big wide road that was easy to trod that led right up to the center of power for that region.

Once they got there, they realized they were not in the right place. The main easy, well-traveled road had led them into a political hot mess. When they told Herod they were seeking a new king to pay him homage, the wise men could feel the anger and hostility pouring out of Herod. He had a reputation for ruthless behavior in order to protect his political power.

Asking Herod, the current King of the Jews, where the new one was born would be like going to the Kremlin today and asking Vladimir Putin, "Where's the new leader of Russia? We have come to pay him homage."

I wonder how Putin would respond?

Vladimir and Herod have a similar history. Vladimir is known to wipe out his opponents. Herod was known to eradicate anyone who threatened his throne, even if they were related to him or previously thought of as his friends.

### **LED TO A TRUE KING**

Thank goodness the wise men wised up to Herod's character and took off in a different direction from Herod's palace. The path lit by the star, (but less traveled), led them to a humble stable set among humble people.

With the help of that blazing star they were led to the true king of the world born among the least of these: shepherds and common animals.

Herod represented everything in human beings that was greedy, cruel, and corrupt. The Messiah would not be born in such a place. Jesus always preferred to be with the blessed ones: the poor in spirit, the mournful, the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers.

Places and people who idolize wealth or develop schemes to gain prosperity are going down the wrong path. That is not the path that leads to Christ.

Like in the days of Herod, we live in a time when political power brokers in gold palaces and towers are ignoring the cries of the poor and turning a deaf ear to the pleas of the desperate, the hungry, the orphans, and the refugee.

“Jesus often told us he would be among the hungry and the thirsty, among the stranger and the immigrant, among those who lack clothing or medical care, among those in prison. Remember, he said, "In so far as you care for the least of these, you care for me." (Reference: Tom Long, "The Wrong Town at the Wrong Time")

Whenever we ignore these least ones and instead support the successful and the powerful, we are on the wrong path.

### **JESUS' GOSPEL IS DEEPLY POLITICAL**

**From the beginning the gospel of Jesus Christ has been deeply political. Politics is entwined into this Epiphany story for today, not in choosing one political party over another, but supporting the leaders who advocate justice and equality for the oppressed and vulnerable, the humble and those in poverty.**

Herod was determined to keep his power. That's why he shook with fear when the wise men told him that a star had risen in the sky to announce the birth of the new king. Herod knew that the birth of the true Messiah meant the end of his own reign over the Jewish people. The people were frightened because they knew Herod was capable of responding in a barbaric way.

Matthew tells us later in the story that he ordered the separation and massacre of all children younger than two years old. He tried to stop Jesus and his kingdom from coming into the world. But when Jesus Christ is at work in the world, the powers of oppression are stopped by us his modern-day disciples.

## PONDER YOUR OWN PATH

This is the time of year to ponder your own path while you still enjoy the gift of life on earth. Consider where you have been, what paths you have followed, what you have learned from them and where you are going this new year?

That is your homework assignment. Write up a few thoughts about your personal epiphanies as they relate to your faith in God. Ponder these questions: Is there more you want to do with your life? Are you feeling a call to explore a new path that brings you closer to the path God has planned for you? It doesn't have to be new career path. It can be a volunteer service path like getting more involved with church ministries, helping immigrants and refugees or by helping our church become more green and our planet healthier.

You might decide to follow the path and be an encourager and mentor like Dr. Peck who inspired others to authentically show love. There are many ways: Be a tutor for students at Montgomery High School, be a volunteer at the Living Room or at FISH. Maybe this is a time in your life when you need to embark on a new adventure and provide volunteer support to the new Council on Aging Social Club program coming to our church next month. It might feel uncomfortable to change and try a new thing when our world seems to be changing so quickly already. Jesus came to earth in such a time as this, and we are all called to follow his path, his way of being in the world, which seems to be traveled less and less.

Like the three wise men, go out of your way to find a closer connection to Jesus. There you will also find joy. Amen.

References: ~ Madeleine L'Engle, in *Cry Like a Bell*, 57.  
Posted on **Growing in Grace**.  
<http://carolinemccain.wordpress.com/>

1/2/2019 The Rev. Dr. Thomas Long - "The Wrong Town at the Wrong Time" - (Matthew 2:1-12) - Day1.org  
[http://day1.org/8313-tom\\_long\\_the\\_wrong\\_town\\_at\\_the\\_wrong\\_time.print](http://day1.org/8313-tom_long_the_wrong_town_at_the_wrong_time.print) 2/4

### **Benediction:**

**Madeleine L'Engle included a poem about Christ coming at unsteady times in her book: *Cry Like A Bell*. It's titled:**

## FIRST COMING

**He did not wait till  
the world was ready,  
till men and nations were at peace.  
He came when  
the Heavens were unsteady,  
and prisoners cried out for release.**

**He did not wait for the perfect time.  
He came when the need  
was deep and great.  
He dined with sinners  
in all their grime,  
turned water into wine.**

**He did not wait till hearts were pure.  
In joy he came to a tarnished  
world of sin and doubt.  
To a world like ours,  
of anguished shame  
he came, and his Light  
would not go out.**

**He came to a world  
which did not mesh,  
to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.  
In the mystery of the  
Word made Flesh  
the Maker of the stars was born.**

**We cannot wait till the world is sane  
to raise our songs with joyful voice,  
for to share our grief,  
to touch our pain,  
He came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!**

**And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forevermore. Amen**



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