

The Road and the Thermos

I have always liked Robert Frost. *The Road Not Taken*.

This standard high school poem reading ends, "I took the one less traveled by and that has made all the difference."

That has always spoken to me even though, admittedly, there have been times in my life where the road less traveled has not proved the best or the correct path.

We learn.

What seems logical, often isn't. What seems brave and daring is often reckless. Inspiration often fades quickly.

We come to a fork, two paths, and wonder, "Which is the correct one?"

What do we do? How do we handle it? What helps us make that decision?

The faith community often has the same dilemma.

"Gosh, that's odd," say some. "Doesn't God direct your path constantly if you live in faith? Doesn't that conviction and moral compass help you choose the right path?"

Well. Yes. Sort of.

For many, the walk of faith is one of boldness and courage.

"Let's see what type of God-statement we can make. Let's not be afraid to take the road less traveled. God will be with us. God will direct us."

We think we hear His direction so clearly. We proceed. Then the path gets narrower. Fallen trees and thistles overcome it. We slip and fall as the road heads down a steep hill. It starts to get dark. We think we hear wild animals nearby. Perhaps it's time to abort and rethink our course.

So, what are we hearing? Why has the path become so cumbersome? Did we choose incorrectly? We were so sure when we started down the road that this path was God's direction. Clarity becomes more difficult to ascertain.

Is He trying to tell me that I have chosen the wrong road and that I really wasn't listening when I came to that fork? Was I thinking I wanted this route because by conquering it, there would be reward for me at the end—reward that was perhaps more my reward than His reward?

Or, have the obstacles come simply because He wants to see how much trust I will have that He will lead me from my questionable and difficult state, providing answers if I am faithful and stay the course?

I sometimes wish choosing a path was like reading the thermostat so I know if the path is hot or cold, easy or hard, God's will or not. The thermos can figure out which is which. Why is it so difficult for me?

I'm told that eventually you know, and God uses both circumstances for growth. But I want to know. Now. Which I guess is one of the flaws of the road less traveled. You want to know right from the outset how it's all going to come out. And that's not for you to know.

As an English major, I always loved literature that spoke words with hidden meanings and metaphorical insights. But decisions and consequences can be tough. Sometimes we proceed tepidly. With caution. Sometimes, we move boldly. Sometimes, we guess right. Other times, we guess wrong. For those of us of faith, we really shouldn't be simply guessing. We take key situations, decisions, and opportunities to God and allow him to speak to us. But what if He doesn't speak. What if we don't hear anything. Does that mean that He isn't there? That He doesn't care?

The Bible says not to lean on our own understanding, so perhaps we tread lightly. Does the decision or direction need to be made right now? Do we read God's tea leaves as saying "wait" or "not yet?" Does the decision seem so very clear to us that we are certain that it's God directing our path, only to fail? Did we fail because it was actually "us" who wanted that path? We wanted it so badly and convinced ourselves it would be so good for us that surely God must be involved somehow? Or was the path such a rough one that we learned things we needed to learn and apply later in life?

I once was convinced that God wanted me to start a company. I worked diligently for nearly two years to prepare for that launch. I did countless hours of research and calculations. I slept barely four hours a night burning the midnight oil. I was convinced He wanted me to have a successful business. Afterall, it would be a business founded and led by

Christian principles. I would dutifully tithe, thanking him for all my success. I would become both a beacon of the community and the church. Everyone would marvel about my corporate, financial and spiritual acumen. But it didn't happen that way. The business blew up. I was nearly a million dollars in debt. My marriage crashed. What happened? I had chosen the difficult path convinced that God would bless me. But it was "my" path and not "his" path. The thistles had overcome my path. The wild animals had eaten me. The path back was not an easy one. But at least I learned to listen. And here I am. The soul whole again.