

When you have to make a difficult or important decision, what guides you? How do you feel when others seem unburdened by things that trouble you? Whether it has to do with deciding whether or not you will allow your children to go to a concert or deciding between chemotherapy and surgery, some choices are more painful than whether to have pasta or salad for dinner.

This reminds me of the first poem I had to memorize, THE ROAD NOT TAKEN by Robert Frost. It was about a fork in the road and wondering which way to go:

*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*

The poem went on to describe two paths ... one well-travelled and the other overgrown ... and the poet chose the road less travelled. The poem ends with the lines:

*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.*

How often do we have to choose a direction, an action, make a decision, and the choices seem so tough. We would prefer to know where each path ends, but choices are never that clear. How can tough choices ever be easy?

Decisions are never made in a vacuum. There is always a basis for any decision. Certainly, facts must be gathered, but the issue of who I am will affect any decision for me and for those around me.

John's words, "Love God! Obey his commands! This is the victory over world!" calls us to allow Christ's love to guide ALL living. Every choice makes a difference.

Where the world tempts us to be motivated by fear, anguish, greed or guilt, his victory sets us free to be confident in his presence and colored by the example of his servant love. Christ doesn't pull us out of world. He simply calls us to share his LOVE with the world!

Life is God's gift, not mine. When I know I am loved by God, will that not affect every choice that I make? When I understand I am a steward of God's creation and called to love as I have been loved, won't that clarify my vision as I approach any "fork in the road."

Faith means I am never alone, and I can have help for any choice and forgiveness when my choice hurts me or someone else. A patient wrestles with whether to undergo chemotherapy or radiation, a teenager struggles with whether to follow the crowd in a bad choice, or risk losing friends by saying "no." None of those are easy choices! And yet when filled with the love of Christ, don't the choices narrow, and the security of forgiveness and God's love lighten the load?

Situational ethics are difficult if "situation" rather than "ethics" becomes the issue, causing choices to be about feeling, emotion, or the pressure of what others say, think, or feel. When I know who I am, my identity helps me with any choice that I make.

Jesus perfectly travelled "the road less traveled." He chose what most avoid and embraced what we all fear. He became like us so we might become more like Him. He conquered what we fear that we might be free from burdens that make choices impossible. In the process, he has modeled for us a new way of living. Choices are colored not by what the world teaches but by the servant love of a humble, triumphant king.

His love calls us to live in the perspective of faith. And what is "faith" other than knowing God's love, his power, and his promise? Choices certainly have a different feel when shaded by the shadow of cross. Choices have a different look when seen under the glow of Easter's empty tomb. When that I am loved, forgiven, and sent, I have a totally different motivation for each and every choice I make. And when that is a pattern for every part of my life, it becomes even easier for the more difficult moments in my life!

Why do some assume it is difficult to follow Christ? The reality is that *the world* wants us to conform to *its* values, and we must choose whom we will serve. The world always has the same message – choose the easy path, the selfish path – that was the first temptation in the garden and continues to be the fruit offered to us today. (And self-serving motives usually result in producing new difficulties as a by-product.)

A young man I baptized as an adult complained that his parents never had taken him to Sunday School or worship, because they wanted let him make his own choice when he was an adult. He shared the pain he felt, because their choice was to shield him from the love of Jesus Christ. Whatever their motive might have been, choosing not to share Christ shared different values. Their vision was forced it upon him, even though they insisted they were making no choice for him. Even sitting on a fence is making a choice, and that choice is to pretend that there is nothing on either side of the fence.

Jesus gave us a new VISION, informed by foot washing, healing, embracing an undeserved cross, and revealing an unexpected empty tomb. Faith makes that my reality and allows God's Spirit to breathe into every choice that I make. Certainly we continue to be surrounded by sin and sometimes even inflict our own selfishness into choices. But the point of the cross is that there is forgiveness and a fresh start, each and every moment of our life. Faith doesn't insure perfect choices but choices blessed with the gift of grace!

Yogi Berra might have said it best when he said, "when you come to a fork in the road, take it!" The reality is, we have no way of making tough choices easier – but Christ does. And when faith, hope and love are the flavor of the day, the pressure has been taken away. No matter where we travel, if faith, hope and love are the motive, we will never travel alone. And if you ever need a definition of grace, this is certainly it. Go in peace!

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