

1 Peter 2:19-25 N.T. 219 (NRSV)

¹⁹For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. ²⁰If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. ²¹For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.

²²“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”

²³When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. ²⁴He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

1 Peter 2:19-25 N.T. Page 219
“The Path Less Traveled”

Opening Prayer: Please bow with me in prayer. Lord God Almighty, creator of the heavens and the earth, speak to us today so that we may know the way that we should go. Lead us in paths of righteousness for your Name’s sake, **Amen.**

Introduction: We all live life from one day on into the next, and as we pass through life, we have many decisions to make. We reach the proverbial fork in the road and the question we all face is “*Which path should I take?*” These are moments full of apprehension. How should we choose? If we choose wrongly will there be a way to take back that choice? Or will we be doomed to go through life filled with regret? Decisions, decisions, our lives are full of decisions.

How many of you had to read Robert Frost’s classic poem, “*The Road Not Taken*,” perhaps you read it in your high school English class? (Raise hand.) It’s a masterful, thought provoking poem, but the interpretations of Frost’s poem are as varied as the people who read it. I want to open today with a reading of Robert Frost’s poem, “*The Road Not Taken*.”

{Play Video: “The Road Not Taken.wmv” [1:50]}

**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 really worn them about the same,**

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**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.**

Many have read Frost's poem and concluded it's about a man who boldly charts his own course and moves ahead on a path few have trod. **Be a nonconformist** and live life your own way. But if that's what the poem meant, **Frost would have** titled his Poem, "*The Road Less Taken*," rather than "*The Road Not Taken*."

Others read Frost's poem and see a man full of apprehension and regret. The man fears he will choose the wrong path and will end up regretting his choice. So, he stands petrified at the fork in the road forever wondering what it might have been like to travel "*The Road Not Taken*."

What we really need is a road map—a guide to show us if one path is better than the other. **Or perhaps there's no difference** and just over the horizon both lead to the same place. Like the Ethiopian eunuch we say, "***How can I know the way, unless someone shows me?***" (Acts 8:31.) Which path should I take?

PAUSE

Move I.

God never promised that life would be easy. Following Jesus is costly. **You have to die to yourself** before you can come alive in Christ. Dying to yourself isn't easy. There's pain. But what God promises is that life will be worthwhile. Whatever you have to suffer, whatever you have to endure, it will pale in the light of God's coming kingdom. **God will make your paths straight.** That's another one of those nuggets of wisdom from ancient Israel's sages. **In Proverbs 3:6 (NIV)** we read, **"In all your ways acknowledge God, and God will your paths straight."** Eugene Peterson paraphrases that verse like this, **"Listen for GOD's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track."**

Last week I ask you, *"Who would you be willing to die for?"* Would you be willing to die for a family member or a close friend? **I then told you** that Jesus was willing to die even for people you wouldn't be. Jesus willingly died for sinners. This week I'm shifting the focus of the question from "who" to "what." **What would you be willing to die for?** Would you be willing to die for your faith? **Would you be willing to die** for the cause of Christ?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran pastor who the Nazis hanged just weeks before the end of World War II. Some call him a martyr. I just know he died because **he actively resisted the Nazi persecution** and extermination of the Jews. Yes see, as a German, Bonhoeffer accepted responsibility for what his countrymen were doing to the Jews. He couldn't sit idly by, so in 1943 he helped plan a **failed assassination attempt** on Adolph Hitler. Bonhoeffer's role **landed him in prison**, and a year and a half later on April 8, 1945 he was condemned to death at a trial without witnesses or without the opportunity to present a defense. At dawn the next morning, **the Nazi's hanged** Bonhoeffer just two weeks before the Americans liberated the camp that had held Bonhoeffer.

Years passed before the story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer began to emerge. Today we know Bonhoeffer best for his book, *“The Cost of Discipleship”* which he wrote in 1937 before World War II began. In his book Bonhoeffer writes of what he calls **“cheap grace,”** and **“costly grace.”** The most quoted sentences from his book are:

“Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline. Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ.”

Cheap grace is actually no grace at all. After all, Jesus paid the ultimate price to make grace available to us all. There is nothing cheap about grace.

As for **costly grace** Bonhoeffer wrote:

“Costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus, it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. It is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: ‘My yoke is easy and my burden is light.’”

To follow Christ is costly. For some, like Bonhoeffer, it even cost their lives. **There really isn’t anything cheap** about grace. Yet the life of faith is still worthwhile. Bonhoeffer’s life was worthwhile. **Yes, God never promised that life would be easy.**

End I.

Move II.

But God will enable you to endure. Nothing can possibly ever come your way that God hasn't seen before. People may speak evil against you, **they spoke all sorts of evil against Jesus.** They accused Jesus of being demon possessed. People may insult you, and slander your name, they insulted and slandered Jesus. People may falsely accuse you, they falsely accused Jesus too. Whatever injustice befalls you; God will give you the strength to endure.

Our Bible Lesson today has Peter telling us that **“it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly”** (1 Peter 2:19, NRSV). Resisting evil and doing good is what God has put each of us here to do. **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** was conscious of God; **he knew the holocaust** was an evil that he needed to resist. **There are things** that are worth suffering for, even dying for.

I'm aware that this isn't a popular topic to preach about here in 21st century America. Most Christians today have fully bought into the America dream. The motto for our lives is the opening lines of the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence. *“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are **Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.**”* Now this might upset you, but the objective of **life isn't the pursuit of happiness, it's the pursuit of holiness.** God doesn't say be happy because I am happy, God says **“be holy because I am holy”** (Leviticus 11:4, 1 Peter 1:16). **Holiness can't stand evil. Holiness can't stand injustice. Holiness can't stand oppression. And when you stand up** again, evil, injustice, and oppression, you might just end up enduring some insults, some persecution, some pain. It comes with the territory. That's the example we have in Jesus' life.

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This is what Jesus spoke about in his famous *Sermon on the Mount*. At the end of the Beatitudes there is a postlude that address the reality of suffering. **In Matthew 5:11-12 (NRSV)** Jesus says, **“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”** There is a cost to discipleship. **The early Christians** knew this firsthand. There is a cost to standing up for what is holy, and just, and right. And that price is suffering.

Now I don’t think we in America have a clue what our brothers and sisters elsewhere in the world endure on a daily basis for being true to their faith. Few others enjoy the religious freedom we do. So whatever minor inconveniences we face for being true to our faith are trivial in comparison. **But as the Apostle Paul** says in his letter to the believers in Corinth, **“For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure.”** (2 Corinthians 4:17, NRSV). Paul endured shipwreck, beatings, and imprisonment for Christ’s sake. In comparison we have endured so little. **But God does, and will, enable each of us to endure.**

End II.

Move III.

So, take the path less traveled—the way of Christ. That’s what it means to be a Christian. That’s what it means to be a follower of Jesus the Christ. You do the things Jesus did. **You feed the hungry**, clothe the naked, shelter strangers, and visit prisoners. You think the thoughts Jesus thought. **You think about** whatever is true, and noble, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable (Philippians 4:8). And you endure whatever Jesus endured. **“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me”** (Matthew 5:11, NIV). **Those are the ways of Christ.** That’s the path less traveled.

Our Bible Lesson today from 1 Peter 2, is one of just a handful of places in the New Testament that quote the great prophet **Isaiah’s “Suffering Servant”** passage. The servant knew the way of suffering. As Peter quotes in **1 Peter 2:23** (NRSV), **“When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.”** **Jesus’ way was the way** of the suffering servant. He endured all things, even death on a cross, so that we might have life and have it to the full.

When we share in the Lord’s Supper I use the threefold invitation that John Wesley, the father of the Methodist movement in 18th-century England, used. **All who do earnestly** repent of their sins, **and who have love** for God and their neighbor in their hearts, **and who desire** the walk in the ways of Christ are welcome at the Lord table. That’s an invitation that included all of Christ’s followers. I pray that’s an invitation that includes you.

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This is Dawn Winstead from Donna's and my home church—**Grace United Methodist Church** in Indiana, PA. Dawn and her husband Ray **sing in the chancel choir**. In fact, Dawn and Ray first met while singing in the choir many years ago. **There's Dawn**, but I can't see Ray in the picture. Anyway, Dawn has a beautiful voice and she is a frequent soloist, **she's even recorded** a CD called "*Blessings*," which includes the Easter classic, *Via Dolorosa*, which is Latin for "*the way of suffering*." Jesus endured suffering to bring us to the Father. Are we willing to endure suffer to help Jesus bring others to the Father too? Here's Dawn singing the chorus of *Via Dolorosa*:

{**Play Audio: "Via Dolorosa Clip.mp3" [0:38]**}

Jesus walked the road of suffering out of love for you and me. He who knew no sin became sin for us that we might become the sons and daughters of God. **The Via Dolorosa** is "*the path less traveled*." **So, take the path less traveled—the way of Christ.**

End III.

Conclusion: Some are nonconformist boldly moving ahead in life charting their own course, while others are petrified that they might choose the wrong path and end up living a life full of regrets. **Yes, God never promised that life would be easy.** Following Jesus is costly. You have to die to yourself before you can come alive in Christ. **But God does, and will, enable each of us to endure.** Whatever injustice befalls you; God will give you the strength to endure. **So, take the path less traveled—the way of Christ.** Do you desire to walk in the Via Dolorosa—the way of suffering—the way of Christ? If you do, when you come to the last day, you'll be able to say the closing line of Robert Frost's "*The Road Not Taken*" and mean it. ***"I, I took the path less traveled by, and that has made all the difference."***

Closing Prayer: Let's pray. Almighty God, you have shown us the way. Now give us the strength and the courage to follow Jesus in that way—the way that leads to life eternal. **Amen!**

Sending Forth: Are you afraid you're making the wrong choices? Is there a chance you'll reach the last day full of regrets? Then you need to start following in the ways of Christ today. Go forth and follow Christ on the path less traveled. It will make all of the difference. **Amen!**