



President Walton's March 2020 Message

Journey to the Cross



Many years ago, I was privileged to sing in the Tour Choir for Concordia College, Bronxville. One of the most memorable pieces we sang, written by Randall Thompson, was titled *Frostiana: Seven Country Songs*. It highlighted some of the poems written by Robert Frost, poet laureate of Vermont. Perhaps his most familiar work was the poem, “The Road Not Taken.” Maybe it has something to say to us about our Lenten journey to the Cross. Here is what Frost wrote:

“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.” It’s all about making choices!

Less than a week ago, we entered into a Lenten journey as we observed Ash Wednesday. While Lent certainly carries a somber tone, we have the joy of knowing how the story ends! However, observing Lent can be a wonderful reminder of the passion of Jesus, and prepare us for a grand celebration of the Resurrection. Jesus’ ministry began with a journey into the wilderness. We read in Mark 1, **“The Spirit immediately drove Him [Jesus] out into the wilderness. And He was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And He was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to Him.”** Each of us are also on a journey, which may require some wandering in the wilderness of this world. We are on this journey whether we choose to be on it or not. How we observe the next forty days of this journey is up to each one of us. What difference can you make during this Lenten season? Which road will you choose?

There is the popular road of people who will vow to give up something for Lent. Traditionally the three practices associated with Lent include prayer, fasting and almsgiving, or caring for the needs of others. In our modern times a rise in the practice of giving up certain “vices” or practicing a form of self-denial, has become common. In fact, this is true even among those who would not declare themselves to practice any religion. People will give up drinking alcohol or soda, eating desert or red meat, watching less TV, or, of course, give up chocolate. That one was particularly difficult when Ash Wednesday fell on Valentine’s Day a few years ago!

In my experience a less traveled road, rather

than give something up, is instead, taking something up! This journey includes praying more, worshipping more, reading God's Word more, participating in the Sacrament of the Altar more or serving others more. Jesus can be seen in each of us this Lenten season by the things we do that reflect Jesus to the world all around us! It is not about the actions we do, as if we can somehow earn God's favor by our actions during Lent. We are saved purely by His grace, and what Jesus already did for us on the Cross. This is why we make the journey, as a response to His grace! In this way we reach many in 2020 for Jesus!



If you ever visit Jerusalem, you can follow “the way of the Cross,” which is the route Jesus is alleged to have followed on His way to Calvary. It winds through Jerusalem, and you get a sense for the journey He willingly made with the Cross for our salvation. You can almost picture in your mind's eye how He struggled under the strain and weight, covered with blood from the open wounds the scourging inflicting, wearing a crown of thorns piercing His holy brow. Jesus was pushed and paraded through the streets on a journey leading to His crucifixion and death. It was an arduous and somber journey. It was also a purposeful journey. It resulted in a death for our sins, but that was not the end. Three days later He arose in triumph and victory, assuring us of that same triumphant victory for all who believe. This is why we choose the road less traveled.

We are living in a post-Christendom world, where once our Christian faith and values were the norm. Today this is no longer the truth. Unlike Frost's poem, each of us face multiple roads that stand before us. The world offers us so many tempting options. Each of us has to make a choice. What road will you follow? The Lenten journey to the Cross may not be an easy one, but it is the best one. Walking with Jesus is certainly the road less traveled in our day, but is the only way we can confidently connect people to Jesus. Lent is not about what you give up or take up—Jesus already did it all!

Lent is a spiritual journey to strengthen our witness for Jesus in the world. It is an opportunity for us to grow in faith, to tell others the sad, but true story of Jesus' death. Don't stop there! We also get to share the truth of His resurrection and the hope it offers to our lives. The world around us so desperately needs to hear this good news. As you anticipate and get busy over the next few weeks, preparing to celebrate Easter, think about all the people you know who will only focus on pretty baskets, jellybeans, chocolate bunnies and colored eggs. They may be co-workers or neighbors, maybe even family members. May they see you on the road less traveled that leads to the foot of the Cross of Jesus. More than that, may you find opportunities to live out your faith in such a way that you can share with someone else the hope and joy we have in the Cross of Jesus. The less traveled road can be lonely, so make sure you take someone along for the journey so you can tell them all about Jesus, who lived, died and rose again to forgive all sins and grant us new life. May your Lenten journey be purposeful and joyful as you choice to journey on the road less traveled!

With you on the journey to the Cross,

Greg

The President's Equip Conference for all church workers AND laity, offering practical, strategic resources for congregations to learn and grow, will be held September 24-26, 2020 at the Hilton Buena Vista Palace in Orlando (across from Disney Springs). The theme is “One Body, Many Parts,” from 1 Corinthians 12, and we desire to bring together the whole family of God in the Florida-Georgia District. In addition to useful workshops, we will have [David Kinnaman](#), CEO of the Barna Research Group, [Donna Snow](#), and for entertainment, [The Skit Guys](#). More information will be available soon.

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Reaching Many in 2020
for Jesus!