

A SERMON

by Rev. Joann H. Lee: March 15, 2026



MAKE GOOD CHOICES!

But careful reading of it shows that the two roads were actually “worn about the same.”

And, so, rather than this poem being about going it alone or choosing to be different from everyone else, perhaps the poem is simply about the choices we make, the justifications we make for the choices we make, and the sentimentality attached as we look back at those choices. So:

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.

Friends, you have chosen to spend your morning today in worship.

May it make all the difference.

John 18:28-40

Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this man?' They answered, 'If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.' Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.' The Jews replied, 'We are not permitted to put anyone to death.' (This was to fulfil what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?' Pilate replied, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?' Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.' Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.' Pilate asked him, 'What is truth?'

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, 'I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?' They shouted in reply, 'Not this man, but Barabbas!' Now Barabbas was a bandit.

AS WE PREPARE OUR HEARTS FOR WORSHIP, considering what it means to make good choices, take a moment to think about what decisions you've already made this morning.

Were they decisions of little consequence? Or were they hard to make?

Will they affect the rest of your day, or the rest of your life? Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" may be familiar to many of us, almost even cliché.

And yet these words seemed quite fitting for today's service. Sometimes this poem is thought to be about rugged individualism and going on the path that no one else has yet trod.

THE AVERAGE ADULT MAKES 35,000 DECISIONS A DAY. 35,000! And that's a low-ball estimate made by the authors of the book *Out of Your Mind*.¹ In it, they talk about how we, as a society, often face "choice overload," and how that can negatively affect us.

I remember back in 2012, *Vanity Fair* ran an article that featured an interview with the then President Barak Obama that told us about how he tries to *minimize* the small decisions he must make. He said: "I'm trying to pare down decisions. I don't want to make decisions about what I'm eating or wearing. Because I have too many other decisions to make."²

He believed that routine and repetition (thus leading to less decisions on the small things of life) would then make him more ready and able to make the big, hard decisions in life, like how to best lead the country.

I remember this article well because Mike, my spouse, suggested I perhaps do something along the same lines, maybe wear the same clothes week to week, eat the same lunch day to day, because he had noticed that generally by the end of the day, when we were finally together again after school and work, I had experienced so much "choice overload" during the day, that I would have what psychologists call "decision fatigue."

I didn't know what I wanted to eat for dinner. I didn't care what we watched on TV. I just couldn't decide anymore. I probably should've taken him up on this suggestion but instead, I took the road less traveled and opted to, every morning, throw a bunch of clothes on the bed agonizing on what to wear, then, trying to figure out if I was: taking a lunch to work or eating out, then, deciding: am I making a cup of tea at home or grabbing a fun matcha drink at the coffee shop.

So, ok, maybe it's not the road less traveled, but it's definitely the road less disciplined. And the road more chaotic. But I fear, like the poet Frost, that I have come too far along this particular road to go any other way now. I am sorry. And, truth be told, I *am* also overwhelmed.

There are so many choices to make, and so many options for each choice. Have you been down the cereal aisle lately?

It is a great blessing, don't get me wrong - these are first-world problems—but we face them day in and day out. It's a part of our lives.

In the mid-90s, when I was but a wee teen, a Christian fad took hold, that tried to help young people make good choices. Bracelets and t-shirts and other swag with the letters WWJD could be found. And where I grew up, in Texas, they were everywhere!

Need to make a decision? WWJD—What would Jesus do? It was made to sound like this was the easy answer we had all been waiting for.

Unfortunately, WWJD didn't quite seem to have the answers for the questions I had back then like: Should I go to the homecoming dance with my friend Mike? What cutesy combination of letters and numbers should I use for my instant messenger screen name? What colleges should I apply to? And should I take that AP class?

As it turns out, the gospels never mention who Jesus took to homecoming, or what classes he took at Hebrew school, or what nicknames he chose to go by. In fact, most of the gospels skip from Jesus's birth to him being around age 30 which, quite frankly, did not feel very helpful for this high schooler who was very earnest on trying to figure out what Jesus would do.

If we look to the scriptures to help us make some of the decisions we face as 21st century Christians living in these United States, the answers will seem elusive. Jesus never had a computer or social media; if Jesus fell in love or got married, we certainly don't hear about it. Jesus never rode in a car or traveled by plane. And when we try to overlay our choices onto his life in first century Palestine, too much is anachronistic!

The Bible is not an instruction manual for life that can tell us black and white answers to the everyday problems we face today.

So what if, instead of asking WWJD for the daily choices we need to make in life, we choose Jesus *as* the Way, the very road we choose to travel?

In the same gospel of John that we're currently in, Jesus says, "I am the Way." (John 14:6)

And early Christians called themselves "People of the Way." By this, they meant that by walking and following in the ways of Jesus, we honor and love God, and we honor and love our neighbor. Because Jesus *is* the Way.

And in a time when truth is obfuscated or distorted, Pilate's question is glaring: "What is truth?" Well, to continue the John 14:6: Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.

To choose Jesus is to choose truth and life.

In today's story, however, when the people were faced with a decision between Jesus and Barrabas, they chose Barrabas.

¹ Cham, J., & Godwin, D. (2025). *Out of Your Mind: The Biggest Mysteries of the Human Brain*. Pantheon.

² *Vanity Fair* article "Obama's Way" by Michael Lewis (October 2012)

Barrabas's ways are familiar to us. We all know what it means to act out in anger, to choose violence, or to make a horrible mistake that harms others. He was a convicted criminal, and the people chose him any way.

I wish this story didn't seem so familiar to us, even today. But we seem to have a penchant for choosing known criminals.

Choosing Jesus, on the other hand, means choosing the way of forgiveness—after all, he breaks bread even with Judas knowing that he will betray him.

Choosing the way of Jesus means choosing the way of non-violence—after all, he tells Peter who is trying to defend him to put away his sword.

Choosing the way of Jesus means choosing the way of humility and service—after all, he washes the feet of his disciples.

And choosing the way of Jesus means choosing the way of mercy and compassion—after all, he kept company with outcasts and sinners, sitting with the vulnerable and the most marginalized of his day.

Unfortunately, choosing Jesus was not popular back then, and it's not popular today.

Invoking the name of Jesus has gotten *real* popular! But actually walking and living the way of Jesus is still not something many people are willing to do.

We cannot start wars, bomb innocents, or climb the ladders of power and prestige while trampling the poor and meek when we walk the way of Jesus.

We cannot ignore victims of sexual exploitation, incarcerate immigrants in detention centers, or allow state-sponsored executions of black and brown bodies when we walk the way of Jesus.

There may be world leaders who invoke the name of Jesus to justify such actions, but when we read the gospels, the stories of Jesus show us a different way altogether.

The average adult makes 35,000 decisions a day. But what if one decision can set us onto a path that allows us to choose wisely throughout our lives?

And, what if this path allowed us to trip, fall, make mistakes and then try again? Because it is the path of resurrection and new life and forever do-overs?

The ultimate choice we face, really, is: Do we choose Jesus, or do we choose Barrabas?

To choose Barrabas, I believe, is easy. And, it is a failure of imagination. As mere mortals, it is hard to have faith and believe or even imagine that the world Jesus spoke of and was ushering in could be possible.

But the work of salvation—the healing and liberation of the world - has already been done by Jesus. And when we walk the way of Christ and take that way over all others, we partner with God in the repairing of this world.

So, what is one thing that might remind ourselves that this day, and everyday forward, we choose Jesus? Could we start the day with a moment of prayer or meditation? Could we read a few verses of scripture during lunch? Could we commit to attending a vigil outside the immigration building with the Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity once a month? Could we regularly help feed or serve others through Pack-a-Sack or the food pantry or the soup kitchen at Martin de Porres?

We have set ourselves on the path that leads to justice, peace, and new life. And I don't know what I'm wearing tomorrow, but I do know I will stand with my neighbors who are facing hate crimes and deportations this day and every day. Because I choose Jesus. And Jesus said to love your neighbor.

Mary Walker, a poet in New Zealand, wrote a poem called "Choice."

And perhaps it can help us make good choices. She writes:

Each day splits
into two, again and again—
hope or despair
faith or fear
love or judgement.
Nothing is inevitable
except, at each fork in the road,
the chance to choose
and then the need
to set your foot upon it.
What would hope do?
What, faith?
What, love?

Amen.

