

Past the Point of No Return ~ Palm Sunday 4-5-09
Mark 11:1-11; Psalm 118:1-2,19-29

Every year when Palm Sunday comes around, and I reflect on the road Jesus had taken to arrive at this day we celebrate as his entrance into Jerusalem, I remember a poem and a verse from a song.

The poem is Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken." Remember it? It goes like this:

*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 that 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 road less traveled by,
 And that has made all the difference.*

What a difference it has made for the world that Jesus took a road others had not. Following his baptism and his days of reflection and fasting in the wilderness, he chose to follow a new way that would bring him, and all of us, closer to God. He did not move on after the forty days and nights in the wilderness to found a new religion. Instead he worked to create a belief system that had meaning for all people, not just those who wanted to maintain the status quo. He took the law that was written on stone tablets and wrote it instead on the hearts and souls of humans.

Religion stopped being "something out there" that was bound up in old rigid formulas and became something "in here." It became more applicable to life and the way it should be lived—with respect and love for God and one another. Jesus was a great reformer. He never stopped in his efforts to reveal God to others as he knew and understood his Creator.

Those around him, who were afraid of the interest he was stirring up, watched and waited for him to make something that seemed to them to be a misstep. Their concern grew when he rode into Jerusalem on a colt, the mount of royalty, signifying to some that he had come to lead a revolt against those in political and/ or religious power. We don't know exactly what size the

reception was that greeted him. But we can suspect that with this ride he passed the point of no return in the eyes and minds of many.

Of course, this brings me to the brief verse of a song from the play “The Phantom of the Opera,” entitled “Past the Point of No Return.” This is my favorite song from that play. That little verse sings:

*Past the point of no return, the final threshold.
The bridge is crossed, so stand and watch it burn,
We've passed the point of no return.*

I am sure Jesus didn't stop to think about the bridges of the old way of doing religion that had been burned by his life and teachings. He didn't have the time to be troubled by what had been. His face was pointed forward and he moved in response to what he believed to be the call and claim of God on his life. He moved forward, our story tells us, knowing what it was that was before him.

In our own lives we often stand at the place where two roads diverge. When we come to these places in life, it is up to us to make wise choices. Often the decisions we make will effect our lives forever. Very often when we make a choice, we pass the point of no return because we know that “way leads on to way” and that we will never go back again.

We may decide on one of two possible careers, we may decide to marry or not to marry, we may decide to spend lives serving others or serving only ourselves, we may decide to take a chance on love or to let it pass by, we may decide to end a relationship or to keep it nourished and going and growing, we may decide to try again to accomplish something we want to or we may decide to give up. These decisions are never made in a vacuum. Ultimately, though, the choice is always ours and we bear the final responsibility for what it is we choose. We can only hope to make decisions that are based on faith and knowledge and wisdom.

This is not to say that we can never change direction in life as we learn more about our choice. Sometimes we do backtrack and select another course of action. But the poet was right in noting that we never can go back to the place where we made the first choice because the times and we have changed and we can never arrive back at that same point no matter how much we might wish to do so.

For Jesus there was no thought of backtracking. He chose the course he was to follow for three brief years of his life. He did have a moment in the Garden of Gethsemane when, in prayer, he asked if the cup he was to drink might pass from him. The answer was, “No.” As we begin this Holy Week, leading up to death and resurrection we understand, once again, how his choice to pass the point of no return has made all the difference for those of us who have followed.

--Amen

