

“THE ROAD LESS TAKEN”

[PULPIT MANUSCRIPT]

Mission Festival (St. Mark’s Lutheran, Watertown, WI - November 5, 8 & 9, 2008)

Matthew 7:13,14 – Rev. Thomas H. Trapp, Madison, Wisconsin

Grace, mercy and peace to you, over and over again, from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

I read to you from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount – Matthew 7: “ENTER THROUGH THE NARROW GATE. FOR WIDE IS THE GATE AND BROAD IS THE ROAD THAT LEADS TO DESTRUCTION AND MANY ENTER THROUGH IT. BUT SMALL IS THE GATE AND NARROW THE ROAD THAT LEADS TO LIFE AND ONLY A FEW FIND IT.”

I am Tom Trapp, the Wisconsin Synod campus pastor at Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. I’ve been there since 1979.

It is an honor and privilege for me to bring God’s Word to you today.

In 1920 American poet Robert Frost wrote the poem: “THE ROAD NOT TAKEN.” He was walking in the woods and came upon a fork in the road – one road was MORE POPULAR than the other, the ground was trampled under foot; it was EASIER to WALK on and easier to FOLLOW.

The OTHER ROAD was LESS POPULAR – it was more GRASSY and HARDER to walk on and harder to follow. Which one should he take?

Robert Frost concluded his poem: “TWO ROADS DIVERGED in a wood, and I—I took the one LESS TRAVELED BY...”

As FOLLOWERS of JESUS, that is the road WE are ON – THE ROAD LESS TAKEN, the road less traveled.

Jesus said, “BROAD is the road that leads to DESTRUCTION” – and MANY are on it! But “NARROW IS THE ROAD that leads to LIFE – and only a FEW FIND it” (Matt 7:13-14).

It is EASY to take the road that is BROAD and wide. Many people are on it!

It is a SUPERHIGHWAY of CHOICES: Humanism, existentialism, nihilism and hedonism to mention just a few “isms.”

SECULAR HUMANISM says, “Find a way to BE HAPPY and make others happy. That is all that matters. Reason and science will guide you, forget religion and supernaturalism.” Secular humanism is a choice.

EXISTENTIALISM focuses on words like “dread, boredom, alienation and absurd.”

Existentialism tells us that “all that matters is the MOMENT.” As the old 60s rock song preaches, “Sha-la-la-la Live for today and don’t worry ‘bout tomorrow...take the most from living, have pleasure while we can” (Grass Roots song). Existentialism is a choice.

NIHILISM says there is NO MEANING in life and there is no objective morality. No right or wrong – everything is subjective. What YOU think is right is right and what YOU think is wrong is wrong. Nihilism is a choice.

HEDONISM preaches all that matters is PLEASURE. “Eat, drink and be merry, tomorrow you will die.” In hedonism pleasure is god and our BODIES are NOT TEMPLES of the Holy Spirit.

These CHOICES (along with all the other “isms” in the world like the religions of Buddhism and Hinduism and Taoism and Judaism) are EASY choices to make -- and MANY are on that SUPERHIGHWAY.

But to STAY ON the ROAD LESS TAKEN – on the WAY of Christ— is HARD. If you walk on the road less taken there will be intimidation and persecution.

In a recent issue of a STUDENT NEWSPAPER ON CAMPUS, the student writer talks about “CRAZY PREACHERS” who insist: “Homosexuality is wrong” and “Jesus is the only Savior.” The writer states that the crazy preachers do NOT UNDERSTAND that there are “MULTIPLE WAYS TO LIVE A LIFE...and NOBODY LIKES TO BE TOLD HOW TO LIVE...” He concludes, “TRUST YOUR OWN VOICE...”(Badger Herald, Sept 29, 2008)

As a so-called “CRAZY PREACHER” who preaches that God gave the 10 commandments, not suggestions and Jesus is the only Savior of the world, I DO UNDERSTAND that there are a MULTIPLE ways to LIVE LIFE.

So do the STUDENTS who come to Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel at UW-Madison! On a campus of 42,000 students our Wisconsin Synod students have seen multiple ways people live their lives.

In fact, we ASKED some of our Lutheran Chapel STUDENTS what were some of the popular BAD ROADS for Christians to TAKE and FALSE PHILOSOPHIES on campus today.

This is what they said:

- +The teaching that there is NO ABSOLUTE TRUTH and everything is relative
- +The philosophy that it does NOT MATTER what you BELIEVE in, as long as you believe in something
- +The false idea that there are NO CONSEQUENCES to casual sex as long as you’re “safe”
- +The MYTH that a good job and LOTS of money make you HAPPY
- +To be a real man you need to DRINK till you drop
- +And a FINAL BAD ROAD for Christians on campus to take is to LISTEN to students who call themselves “LUTHERANS” and say: “SIN as much as you want because God will FORGIVE you anyway.

It is EASIER to take the WIDE ROAD than the ROAD LESS TAKEN.

Several years ago a Wisconsin Synod student, who was baptized and confirmed in the faith, attended a PHILOSOPHY COURSE at UW. The professor started the class by saying during the semester they will examine the question: "Is there a God?" He said he would teach it from a NEUTRAL POINT of view. He first presented some of the arguments for the existence of God. Then, as the semester progressed, he led the students, with GREAT LOGIC, to the belief that THEY themselves did "NOT EXIST." This may seem strange that one can use logic to get people to think that they themselves do not exist, but just sit in a class of a very intelligent professor and you'll be surprised how the power of persuasion works. This young intelligent Lutheran student started to doubt his own existence. He said, then the professor made the easy deduction that if you did not exist, then certainly God does not exist (except in your mind and imagination). In the last session the professor concluded, "THIS PROVES THAT THERE IS NO GOD."

This young man [Jesse] lost his faith and was TAKEN OFF Christ's ROAD to LIFE. But by the grace of God, the IMPLANTED WORD that had been in his heart was STIRRED up by the HOLY SPIRIT and eventually his faith was REAWAKENED and today he is active in one of our Lutheran churches.

The Bible says in Proverbs 14 (12): "THERE IS A WAY that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death."

There are MANY ROADS on CAMPUS and in your COMMUNITY that lead to DESTRUCTION.

If you are on one of those roads GET OFF of it!

The Bible says, "SEE TO IT THAT NO ONE TAKES YOU CAPTIVE THROUGH HOLLOW AND DECEPTIVE PHILOSOPHY, WHICH DEPENDS ON HUMAN TRADITION AND THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF THIS WORLD RATHER THAN ON CHRIST" (Colossians 2:8).

Our students who come to the Chapel are BOUND and DETERMINED to stay on the ROAD LESS TAKEN. They know the IMPORTANCE of HEARING God's Word and OBEYING it.

For that reason we offer TWO DIFFERENT worship services a week in which about 320 worship each week...on Wednesday night at 9 p.m. that is an INFORMAL service (come-as-you-are style) and a completely different Word and sacrament service on Sunday morning. We also have about 9 weddings a year.

Our prayer is to REACH IN to OUR people and to reach OUT to the LOST community on campus.

We REACH IN with not only worship services but also BIBLE STUDIES. Over 100 attend some form of Bible study each week.

During SPRING BREAK we send out about 25 students to help various HOME MISSIONS through the Synod's TRAVEL CANVASS WITNESS ministry.

We have a full-time Informational Technology person who works to keep our WEBSITE GOING. We have about 2,000 WELS students at UW-Madison (as many as at Martin Luther College, Wisconsin Lutheran College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary combined). Students use the Internet all the time. It's one way our students (and others) can find us. We have past sermons on it and current events on it. Check us out! Google Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel Madison and you'll find out about our ministry.

We also have a LARGE MISSION FIELD at UW-Madison.

Last Sunday after I preached on the FACTS and FAITH of Jesus' resurrection from the dead (John 11 – "I am the Resurrection...Do you believe this?")—one of the students came up to me and said, "I've been struggling with that question, thank you for helping me." He is one of MANY LOST on campus.

Every week we have DOUBLE DOLLAR DINNER and DEVOTION upstairs. About 100 attend and 35% of those who eat are NOT Wisconsin Synod. If your church would like to get involved, you're welcome to come once a semester and bring food and serve it to 100 hungry students. It also gives you an opportunity to see our wonderful center.

In February of 2006 we dedicated our new Chapel-Student Center that has 26,000 square feet. Our first building had only 9,000 sq ft. and people came just a few days a week for worship, meetings and a meal. Now students come 7 days a week! Our prayer was to reach out to the neighborhood students with Jesus with our new building and staff. Now 100s of NEIGHBORHOOD students study every day in our new Chapel-Student Center. We recently received a note from three of them who are NOT of our CHURCH BODY. Here is what the note said...I read to you: "DEAR CHAPEL, MY TWO ROOMATES AND I WERE IN MADISON FOR SUMMER SCHOOL AND WE USED YOUR STUDY CENTER ALMOST EVERY DAY...I'M WRITING BECAUSE I WANTED YOU ALL TO KNOW HOW MUCH WE APPRECIATED THE STUDY CENTER. IT WAS ONE OF THE BEST PLACES TO STUDY IN-- WE MADE USE OF THE COFFEE, A/C, FOOD AND LAUNDRY. I ESPECIALLY ENJOYED HEARING THE MUSICIANS PRACTICE!" [Now here's the best part:] "I DO NOT CONSIDER MYSELF A CHRISTIAN, BUT I DID BORROW A COPY OF THE BIBLE [we offer free Bibles on a table] AND HAVE BEGUN READING IT."

Our prayers of REACHING OUT are being answered in so many ways.

We not only want to KEEP our people on the ROAD LESS TAKEN, we also want to PUT new people on the road less taken!

For example, we have had an intentional INTERNATIONAL MINISTRY for over 25 years on campus. There are 4,200 international students not counting their spouses and families who attend UW-Madison. They come from over 100 nations and are often the

brightest and best from those countries. Today we bring Jesus to about 50 students and their families each week not to mention teaching about 200 different international English each week.

We also offer “Baking and Bible” at our new Chapel. Many of the Asian students like to learn how to bake so they are taught how to bake by our International Coordinator Cari Larsen and then she and the international women read the Bible to study English and God’s Word at the same time!

Recently we have been bringing Christ to 12 JAPANESE people! Our missionaries in Japan find it difficult to connect with the Japanese.

Our STUDENTS are committed to STAYING on the ROAD LESS TAKEN and BRINGING OTHERS on it.
WHY? Because it LEADS to LIFE!

FOLLOWING JESUS gives LIFE MEANING.

With Jesus we know the answers to the HARDEST QUESTIONS of LIFE: WHO we are, WHERE we came from, WHERE we are going and WHAT we are doing here. We are CHILDREN of God through faith in Jesus; we were CREATED by God and are heading to BE WITH GOD in eternity. Until then WE SERVE HIM and GLORIFY his name through our lives.

Robert FROST ended his poem in an amazing way: “TWO ROADS DIVERGED IN A WOOD, AND I—I TOOK THE ONE LESS TRAVELED BY, AND THAT – HAS MADE ALL THE DIFFERENCE!”

The road less taken MAKES all the difference in OUR LIFE—it LEADS to life with God!

Stay on that Road—bring OTHERS on that road—and you will never regret it. Never.