There is a poem by Robert Frost I am sure you know, at least the very beginning and the last bit of it. It is called, “The Road Not Taken,” and it reads in its entirety, 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 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.

When we quote this poem, very nearly everyone recites only the very last bit. And very nearly everyone uses the last line as a call to break free from the crowd and follow the lesser-trod road toward one's unique future.

That isn't what Frost intended. According to Frost's biographer, Lawrance Thompson, when Frost would introduce the poem during readings, he would note that the speaker was based on a friend who, "whichever road he went, would be sorry he didn't go the other." (https://www.enotes.com/topics/road-not-taken/in-depth)

Meaning, rather than a courageous, carefree approach to life and decision-making, Frost's words convey a tone of regret, an element of wistfulness, of "what if," that causes one to look back rather than to look forward. Our very human tendency to wonder if all our choices—big, small—change the trajectory of our life in a radical, life-altering way.

But at least a choice is made.

Too often, when we arrive at a crossroads, we either become paralyzed by the decision before us, or, we attempt to have it both ways. Never really committing to a resolution, we either turn around and head back from whence we came or we effectively sit down and refuse to move. Instead of deciding, we look around us at how other people are living and try to exist on both sides of a fence.

If we are truthful, we know that we should choose, we know what we should choose. Yet we are unwilling to dedicate ourselves to the life required of us by that decision. Neither is a whole, holistic approach to life. Neither is a faithful way to live as God's children.

Still, that is what the people of the Exodus do the entire forty plus years of their wandering. And so, in our first reading, the Lord finally calls them on it by way of his servant, Joshua.

The people have had an eventful time since Moses turned over the reins of leadership to his protege. They have crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land, battled those who lived in Canaan, and received their allotments of land. And now, at the end of Joshua's life, they have reached another crossroads. And so Joshua assembles the people to hear his farewell address which, like Moses's, has to do with Israel's future, and their past—because, as they tend to do, the people of the Exodus have forgotten.

The Lord knows this about these wayward children, and so, through Joshua, the Lord calls on Israel to remember. To remember that they remain in covenantal relationship with God stretching all the way back to the moment the Lord calls Abraham away from his family and their gods and promises blessing upon blessing in the form of family and land.

All the Lord requires of Abraham in return is for Abraham and his household to be faithful. To believe and obey as they boldly and courageously step into the unknown, trusting God's providence to care for and guide them. To decide every single day to be righteous, which, when you get right down to it, is all about loving God, and serving God, and worshiping God.

Sounds easy enough. But it isn't, not really. Nor is it meant to be. It is, rather, an intentional, daily choice, which ensures we dedicate ourselves, our every moment, to following God. And, because it is a choice, it is easy to be swayed, to go along with the crowd, to make the wrong decision or no decision at all.

The Lord knows this about us, and so the Lord speaks very clearly to the Israelites to make sure we get the point, to make sure we choose wisely: revere the Lord. Serve God sincerely and faithfully. Worship the Lord your God alone. And if you are unwilling, if you are hesitant, if you are fearful, well then, by all means, choose something else. Who or what will you worship if you will not worship the Lord?
At its most basic, the word "worship," from the Old English "worth-ship," means to ascribe worth. (http://bit.ly/2iDesgW) It could be any

thing, or any one, which occupies our thoughts, feeds our souls, shapes our emotions, determines our giving, dominates our time, day in and day out, whether life-giving or life-depleting.

You may be thinking, well, surely I worship God! But whose name do you most often utter? Whose merits do you most often proclaim? What thing do you believe you must have, right now? Who are you living your life in service to? What is at the center of your life?

If we are honest with ourselves, we recognize there is always something or someone other than God preoccupying our thoughts in any given moment. But the Lord our God is a jealous God. And so our good God asks us to decide. For we cannot love and serve the Lord alone if we are exclusively loving and serving another. Which means, when we come to the crossroads requiring us to make this choice, every second of every day, our God asks us to choose the Lord.

There is more. When we make this choice, when we take the fork in the road leading to the Lord Almighty, well, our worship and service are to be true. Honest. All-encompassing. Without pause or regret. Focused on God alone. Because the Lord knows when our devotion is wholly for our good God. And when it isn't.

So now for some questions: why does this matter? Isn't even half-hearted worship and service better than nothing? Isn't heading to church on a Sunday morning sufficient? Isn't dropping a few coins in the offering plate plenty? Isn't giving a little of our time, now and then, to help another, enough? And when we're here, all together, what's the harm taking pride in our singing? Our speaking? Our worship planning?

Doesn't gracing this sacred space mean we can then live as we please and call it a day and get points for that?

Well, not exactly, because worship and service impacts all areas of our lives, every single day. The prophet Amos, in probably his best known judgment speech, speaks for the Lord against Israel when he says this:

> Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord! Why do you want the day of the Lord? It is darkness, not light; as if someone fled from a lion, and was met by a bear; or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall, and was bitten by a snake. Is not the day of the Lord darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it? I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Amos 5.18-24)

Ascribing worth to God is serious business. It is also joyful and soul-stirring and a sacred and holy privilege as we enter into the courts of praise. Worship is meant for God, not for ourselves, not for others. And it is meant to flow into our thoughts, our words, our actions, so all may know to whom we belong.

If we have not chosen the Lord alone to love and serve and worship, if we are not giving God our hearts, our minds, our souls completely, every moment of every day, well, God knows it. And God rejects it. And justice will roll down. Because time is short, and the kingdom of God is here, and who knows when God will return to make all things new. Time is of the essence.

Here's another thing about worship. When we gather together to be in God's presence, it is all of us who worship. Not just the ones who speak or sing or play up front, but all of us in this holy place who gather and join our hearts and voices, together. And, it requires our best selves, given with great love and joy and purpose. Not out of

obligation, but from sheer delight and thanksgiving in response to who God is, what God has done for us. For our worship services are the worth-ship we present to our God. And God delights in our best offerings.

Sounds great. But a word of caution. Twentieth century pastor, A.W. Tozer, described worship this way: “I can safely say, on the authority of all that is revealed in the Word of God, that any man or woman on this earth who is bored and turned off by worship is not ready for heaven.”

Strong words. God wants us actively engaged in glorifying our Lord when we are together, when we are alone, in worship. The Lord does not want us to busy ourselves critiquing the service, to be apathetic in our prayers, to be half-hearted in our singing, to be stingy in our giving, when our hearts and minds are to be turned towards God. Because worship is all about our Lord. Not about us.

But, and hear me now: God also receives us as we are, at all times, in all places, including worship, if we sincerely desire to enter into God’s presence. God invites us to lay down at God’s feet our burdens, our hurts, our desires, our fears, our pre-occupations, our frailty, our doubts, all of it, even when we are venerating our God.

Because when we are in this place for God alone, God desires us, God’s children, to be a part of it, wherever and however we are, bowing down before our Lord. And, when we rise, and we will rise, we will be made ready to love and serve both God and one another. No matter how hard our lives are, no matter how terrifying the world is, no matter how unsteady we feel, no matter.

And so, my friends, the decision is before us: to love and serve and worship the Lord our God, in all ways, in all times, in all places. Or to take another road, to venerate another, and look back with regret. Choose. This day. For we are wise because God is the choice. Thanks be to God. Amen.