

Years ago, I served a small congregation that decided to merge with another small Disciples church. Both churches agreed to put their buildings up for sale and build a new church together, though the economy crashed and foiled the new building plan. One church building sold quickly, and so we moved into the other building. They worked through issues of how to serve communion, what words to use in the Lord's Prayer (sinners or debtors or trespassers) and all the other logistics that go with combining worship and running a church, but the decision that seemed to get them stuck was on what to name the merged church.

We collected ideas, put the suggestions on a ballot, and then had a vote. When the results came in, the committee was not pleased with the choice. The first choice just didn't seem to fit, and neither did any of the other suggestions. One member of the group lamented, "We're at a crossroads for a change, and we can't come up with a name." Suddenly someone in the group exclaimed, "That's it! Crossroads. We're at a crossroads in our faith

and the life of our churches, and our church sits at a major intersection of two crossroads. That's our new name: Crossroads." And from that moment, the group knew the name of the church.

I think that name describes many of our lives too, for we often find ourselves at a crossroads, a decision, a choice. The writer of Psalm 1 must have experienced the same sort of choices that we face, for he wrote about two paths or roads that people could choose to walk: what he calls the road of the wicked or the road of the righteous.

The path of the wicked, he suggested, is traveled by sinners and scoffers, with disrespectful people sitting alongside the road yelling sneering comments as you walk by. He compared them to the straw or dust blown around in the wind, flitting around without any direction.

The psalmist then examined the other road, those who follow God's teachings, both day and night. The writer called this the path of the *tsadaq*, a Hebrew word often translated as "righteous," which simply means doing the right thing, living a

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moral life. But there's a problem with this word, I think, for we don't always know what the right thing is to do. Do you always know the best choice to make? I don't, and sometimes I have found myself walking along what I thought was the right path only to discover I'm on a rocky road filled with obstacles that I stumble over or holes that I fall into.

There are other times I stand looking at the multiple paths, feeling frozen in time, afraid to make a choice, wondering which way to go, as poet Robert Frost captured in his poem "The Road Not Taken."

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.¹

Sometimes we may find ourselves walking along the road we believe is the best, and then we find ourselves at an intersection with another road. Do we continue on the road we're on, or do we take the other road? It's hard to see what lies ahead on either road. Which way to go?

Sometimes the path we take may be on what seems the most popular—what everyone else is doing. For others of us, we may take the road less traveled, like the path taken by the traveler in Frost's poem.

In today's age of electronic gadgets, we may find the question about which road to take a silly one, for our Global Positioning System, GPS as we

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call it, gives us turn-by-turn guidance to any destination we desire. Many of us have heard, however, of GPS guiding someone to a road that no longer exists, to bridges that have collapsed, or to roads closed due to construction. If we follow a GPS without remaining alert, we could find ourselves on a road to nowhere.

The psalmist reminds us, however, of another GPS: God's Positioning Spirit. When we find ourselves lost and confused, God knows exactly where we are located, for God never loses us. God's Spirit continues to move in our lives, offering us direction along those rocky paths we may travel. Traveling together in this community of faith helps us sense God's Spirit moving among us.

As one writer explained about the path of righteousness, the meaning of the Hebrew word *Tsedeq*...means equity...and prosperity... Equity and prosperity taken together imply a communal rather than individual sense.²

We travel better through life with others rather than by ourselves, and together we discern where God's Spirit is guiding us. We become like the other image from Psalm 1:

[We] are like trees
planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
and their leaves do not wither.
In all that they do, they prosper.

We are like the fruit on a tree, all interconnected through branches to the trunk and to the roots, grounded in GPS, God's Playful Spirit. Graceful Positive Spirit. In being connected to the tree, we prosper, we bear fruit. We make the world a better place.

When you find yourself standing at a crossroads of two roads, trying to decide which way to go, remember your connection to the branches of this tree we call the church, and know that that you have guidance from, GPS, God's Playful Spirit.

¹ www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44272/the-road-not-taken

² "On Justice and Righteousness," Eden's Bridge, Jan. 11, 2012, <https://edensbridge.org/2012/01/11/on-justice-and-righteousness-mishpat-tsadaq-strongs-4941-6663/>