

“Another Road”  
Matthew 2:1-12

Since I’m a Chicagoan, I’m the Odd Man Out in my family given that my children - and their mother - were all born in Hartford. Going a bit farther afield, my wife’s father, the Rev. Henry G. Wyman, D.D., born in Brewer, Maine, is a graduate of Hartford Seminary Class of 1956; his wife, Dr. Sona Averill, was born in New Hampshire but grew up in Bangor. And so Bangor proved to be the center of our family until a couple of years ago, when the homestead was sold off and my in-laws were packed up and sent to Massachusetts. I still don’t think Dr. Averill has recovered - she once claimed that nothing south or west of Boston was really New England. I guess perspective counts for something.

Through the years, then, my family has spent a lot of time up in Bangor. We became intimately familiar, as a result, with I-95, the Mass. Pike, I-495, I-290, and I-90. But one time we decided to do things a little bit differently. Instead of taking the Maine Turnpike on the way home, we left Bangor by taking U.S. Route 202. Now, Route 202 is a strange road; most of you know, no doubt, that it goes nearby here, through Granby and Simsbury. Trace it on a map sometime: it is the highway that actually begins in Bangor at the corner of Main Street and Union, right where the Unitarian Church used to be, and ends up in Wilmington, Delaware. I wonder if anyone has ever driven its full length? Those two towns seem like unlikely candidates to connect.

No matter! We set out one morning from Bangor on 202. And what a day that turned out to be. From Bangor to Augusta we lost no time at all, since 202 (despite its lower speed limit) is more direct. Yet we had more interesting scenery - an occasional house or farm to see - and the road was somehow more satisfying ... maybe simply because it was different from what we were used to.

We lost a little time getting through Augusta, and then lost more and more time as we wandered through villages and towns, seeing parts of Maine and New Hampshire that

were totally new to us. I even saw a mailbox with the name Steven P. Blackburn on it! We were tempted to stop just to see who my namesake was, though we decided to press on.

To make a longer story shorter, we arrived home two hours later than we would have from taking the interstate system. Yet it seemed that little of the nervous fatigue from gripping a steering wheel and driving at speeds which are, shall we say, unnatural, had taken any toll. All because we took another road. Not the way that the whole rest of the world takes as it rushes along, eager to get from point A to point B without noticing what happens in between, along the way. We had decided to break from the mold, to stop letting others do our route planning for us, to try something new, something different, something that had to be rediscovered to be appreciated.

We did it that way because it just seemed an interesting idea at the time. There was no flash of insight, no great brainstorm. Just a glance at a map and the thought, let's try it this way this time.

Sometimes it is luck, sometimes it is coincidence, that makes us choose to do something out of the ordinary. But at a later time we can trace back and see that what seemed to be mere coincidence was more than that, what was luck was more profound than that, what was chance was really not subject to chance at all.

Of course, there are those watersheds in your life that you know you are going through, where life takes a sudden turn and you know that things will be different, for better or for worse. Saul had a moment like that on the road to Damascus. Moses had a moment like that when he beheld the burning bush, and removed his sandals - for he was on Holy Ground. And three wise men had that moment when they discovered a star in the heavens, picked up their burdens, and followed.

Many others of us have had our turning points - that sometime in our lives when the Divine has reached out and touched us - touched our mind, our heart, the very inner being of our soul. Touched us, so that the scales fall away from the eyes, the hardness

melts away from the heart, the desperation is soothed out of the soul, the fatigue and weariness are refreshed so that once what might have seemed like a dead-end suddenly opens into vistas shown to us by Providence through Whom all things are made new.

It does not necessarily take a flash of insight for Providence to do its work. We know of no “road to Damascus” experience for John the Baptist. We have not read about a life-changing experience for Ruth, for Joshua, for Amos as he tended his flocks. But they too felt the hand of God in their lives, moving them so that they too were refreshed and made new.

By whichever way people have been touched by God, their lives have been the different for it. Moses did not return to his flocks. Ruth did not return to her pagan homeland. Joshua did not look back when he crossed the Jordan. Saul did not return to persecuting the people of God. And the wise men did not return to King Herod to tell him what they had seen, how they had marvelled, and what they had witnessed. All of these people moved on, by another road.

Another road that changed their daily lives. No more were they to follow the routine that had led to nowhere, to that dead-end, where God had had to intervene to set things aright again.

Another road that opened their eyes to new possibilities, new perspectives on what God has in store for us and for our world, if we would only let God speak to us, reveal himself to us - if only we would invite him to be with us, as Emmanuel.

Another road that brings us more closely in touch with the true realities of God’s world, where we see all the work that needs to be done - not our work according to our will, but God’s work. There are lives to be touched, souls that mourn, stomachs to feed, thirsts to quench. They have always been around us - but have we seen them? Have we been blinded as we travel along at top speed, ignoring the scenery, avoiding the towns and the villages, seeing only our goal, our path, our way made straight - ours only

because the whole world seems to travel that way, so that we forget there is another road that is indeed less traveled.

If you have encountered the Christ-child, grown with him, supped with him, sacrificed with him, and beheld his glory, no doubt you have seen this other road. This other road is not easy. It is not well traveled. It may seem to take all the longer to arrive at a destination that you cannot even see right now - it is so far off in the distance.

And yet along this road we are never alone. The One who blazed its path still walks its lanes. The One who promises us our reward at its end will be with us all along the way to make sure that if we need help, help will be there.

For this other road is a way of peace in the midst of life's strivings, a road of love in the middle of life's lack of caring, a road of joy despite trials, a road of life in the midst of so many dead-ends. This other road is always there - and even though its scenery is not always beautiful, you will see things that might make you pause and wonder at life itself. You may even stop to help a stranded traveler, to direct a lost child, to visit with others you might not have met otherwise.

The choice is ours to make. May the wisdom of the universe, the sustainer of life itself, the Word made flesh, guide us all on the road we take.

Let us pray: