

**Chapel—October 16, 2013**  
***A More Excellent Way***

Consider with me the poetry of Robert Frost:

*The Road Less Traveled*  
by Robert Frost

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.

I love that poem; its metaphor highlights the fact that life is filled with choices. The choices we make and the path we take can literally make the difference in who we are and what we become.

You're in college. You're in your late teens, early twenties. This is the time you look down life's pathways and try to determine which way to go. More than once you have stood and sought direction and guidance—wondering what life holds.

I must tell you, there is no perfect journey; there is no flawless plan.

What I can do this morning is show you the way that transcends the uncertainties of life and its seasons. I have no planning algorithm; instead I want to show you “a more excellent way”.

I hint at this path at least once a year when I invite you to sing “the president’s cheesy song”:

*Did anybody tell you I love you today?  
Did anybody tell you I love you today?  
Did anybody tell you I love you today,  
Put me on your list, let me be the first,  
I love you today.*

*God loves you and I love you and that’s how it should be.  
God loves you and I love you and that’s how it should be.  
God loves you and I love you and that’s how it should be.  
Put me on your list, let me be the first,  
I love you today.*

I’m not being syrupy and sentimental; when we sing this, I’m introducing you to who we are. The very nature and fabric of Northwest Nazarene University is ordered around God and God’s love. Our students do not merely come to us to learn something; to come to NNU is to be invited to walk with someone—that someone is God. Life is more than the vocational pathways we take; the core of life is centered in our relationship with God and with each other. And all these relationships are to be defined by God’s love. This is the more excellent way.

There is a set of common college questions:

“What’s your major?”  
“What do you want to know?”  
“How will you use what you now know?”  
“What will you accomplish with what you know?”

These are “knowledge is power” questions. They have a proper place and focus.

Yet in the midst of wondering what to do, where to go, what to pursue, let me frame a different set, a transcending set, of questions.

“Does the love of God define your life?”  
“Will the love of God define your life?”

Life’s path choice isn’t so much vocational, as it is relational. To live a life of ultimate meaning, significance and worth, is to choose to live a life with God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

God beckons you and me to come to Him. God wants us, intends for us, to live life from within an intimate, loving relationship with Him. God is love and we are called to learn to live all of life from within our relationship with God and God’s love.

Yet we don’t know what to do with this reality. It is easier for us to dwell on human achievement and material things.

The source, measure and goal of life is not vocational, it's relational. God and God's love are the road less traveled. God and God's love are first, foremost. God and God's love are the more excellent way.

This morning I want us to look at the relationship between God the Father and Jesus the Son to understand the nature of God's love for us. Throughout the Gospel of John, as we follow the life and character of Jesus, we come to realize that Jesus lives in intimate relationship with the Father; the life that Jesus lives, the manner in which He acts, is in fact God's love on display. Jesus said, "He who has seen me, has seen the Father."

The love of God energizes and defines the life that Jesus lived on earth.

So let me ask the question again, as you look down life's path and the intersections and junctions that await, both known and unknown—"will the love of God define your life?"

God intends for our answer to be yes. In John, Chapter 17 Jesus prays that the love that God the Father has shared with Jesus the Son, might also be the love that His disciples share with Him and God the Father. We are to learn how to live in God's love, so that we might learn how to live out God's love.

Let me highlight four dimensions of God's love, each displayed in the life of Jesus Christ, that mark the path we are to take if we are to live life in relationship with God, experiencing and expressing God's love in and through our lives.

*God's love is an abiding love.*

*God's love is a sending love.*

*God's love is a serving love.*

*God's love is a joyous love.*

### ***Abiding Love***

God the Father and God the Son shared a level of intimacy within the Trinity that we can only imagine. This loving relationship, Abba, Father and Jesus the Son was the source and sanctuary for all that Jesus was and did within the world. Jesus resided in the love of God.

Hear me when I say, that is the plan for you and me too. Listen to the invitation of Jesus:

*As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love. John 15: 9, 10*

We are to become grafted into a loving relationship with the Triune God.

It is here, in loving relationship with Jesus and the Father that we learn of God's unconditional love for us. It is here, in the loving arms of the Holy Spirit, that we are to abide amidst the uncertainties, failures and foibles of life. If you are choosing to have the love of God define your life, this is where you must begin.

Learning to live here, abide here, remain here, is no small feat. It requires accepting a love so distinct from the conditional love the world offers that it seems foreign to us, as if from

another Kingdom. If you don't "get this", living in this relational reality, the other dimensions of God's love will only be artificial acts on your part, not genuine expressions of a God love that resides within.

You know what I think? Talking about abiding in God's love is ineffective. Let's sing about it. To better appreciate the nature of the love of God available to us let's turn to one of my favorite practical theologians, Mister Rogers. Sing with me:

*It's you I like,  
It's not the things you wear,  
It's not the way you do your hair,  
But it's you I like.*

*The way you are right now,  
The way down deep inside you,  
Not the things that hide you,  
Not your toys, they're just beside you.  
But it's you I like, every part of you,  
Your skin, your eyes, your feelings  
Whether old or new.*

*I hope that you'll remember  
Even when you're feeling blue  
That it's you I like.  
It's you yourself, it's you.  
It's you . . . I . . . like!*

Do we "get it"? That's not a cheesy little kid's song. It's essential. It's a melodic description of the unconditional love of God for each and every one of us. In order for your life to be defined by God's love, you must genuinely, earnestly, learn to live in God's wonderful, accepting, forgiving, loving embrace.

Only as we learn to lovingly abide in God can we then go on to properly love self and others.

Maybe I shouldn't be asking "do you get it?" Maybe I should be asking, are you willing, are you able to receive the love of God?

### ***Sending Love***

If the first dimension of the love of God is inward, the second dimension is outward. God's love is a sending love. God sent Jesus into the world. It was an expression of God's love.

*God showed how much He loved us by sending His only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through Him. This is real love. It is not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. I John 4: 9, 10*

God sent Jesus; He is the incarnational display of God to humankind. God took on flesh and walked among us. The loving God is the reaching God, the sending God.

At this time in your life it is important to remember, God is still a sending God. As our relationship with God grows and matures we are being sent. Jesus said as much in His prayer:

*I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. They are not part of this world any more than I am. Make them pure and holy by teaching them your words of truth. As you sent me into the world I am sending them into the world. John 17: 15-18*

Part of our work among you is the act of preparation; we seek to foster your maturation; for we know, you are being sent out. We want you to be ready. Most importantly, we believe you are being sent out for a purpose. Jesus said:

*Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you (John 20:21),*

He did so with the knowledge of a plan laid before the foundation of the earth. You are, we are, being sent out. We are called to leave our self-centered existence, and go out into the world with the love of God.

### ***Serving Love***

The third dimension of God's love is part of a natural progression; God's love is a serving love.

Jesus is quite clear, He loves as an act of service to the Father on behalf of humankind. Consider these passages:

*For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many. Matthew 20: 28*

*And so when He had washed their feet and taken His garments, and reclined at table again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right; for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you." John 13: 12-15*

*This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for one another. I John 3:16*

The love of God learned in our abiding, and the love of God obeyed in our sending, is the love of God expressed in serving. Jesus calls us to serve. I cannot predict, nor do I presume to know when and how you will be called to serve based upon your abilities, interests and aptitudes. All I know is the loving God with whom you abide, is also the sending God, and the purpose of God's sending is so that you will find yourself in a place where you have been called and equipped to serve God and others.

The incarnation of God was not reserved for Jesus alone. In our own finite ways, we too are called, through acts of service, to be agents of the Kingdom of God: lifting up the lost,

shining light into the darkness, healing the hurting, bringing hope to the hopeless. To live life in God's abiding, sending, serving love is to learn the heavenly art of seeking the good of another without any hope of personal gain.

### ***Joyous Love***

Finally, Jesus intends for our loving relationship with God to have certain outcomes; to bear fruit. Listen:

*If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. John 15: 10, 11*

*I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. John 17:13*

Remember my question of you? Will the love of God define your life? If you said 'yes', how then do you know if the love of God is defining your life? Use these questions as a gauge and a guide:

Are you abiding in God?

Are you actively and obediently willing and available to be sent out by God?

Are you engaged in service to others, simply because they are persons created in the image of God?

And now, in this fourth dimension of God's love, are you experiencing a sense of joy that is not of this world? Not temporal happiness, eternal joy. This joy is an outcome of the outpouring of God's love in our lives. God intends for us to live a life of joy, a joy that wells up in greater measure as we more fully and ably learn to express our love for God through the giving of self to God and others.

God calls us, commands us, to live lives of love. Joy comes when we yield to God and His love, when we learn to lay aside our cares for those of another, to learn to say to God the words "Thy will be done".

The fact of the matter is, the poem isn't cliché, and the songs aren't cheesy or childish. They're fundamental. This is the way life is to be lived. This is the more excellent way.

God loves you. And He wants you to learn to live in His love—to abide there. And He calls you, sends you, to go out and express His love to others. To show them, through your selfless actions, your gifts of service, that you love them and God loves them. This is the way of joy. You see—we really mean it when we sing, "God loves you and I love you, and that's how it should be."