

Matthew 7.13-14
You CAN Get There from Here!
WRCOB 9.15.24

The summer I graduated from high school.
A buddy and I hopped a freight train
From Chicago to Minneapolis.

Once we arrived in Minnesota
We had a bite to eat, took in a movie

And then back to the railroad yard
To find a train home.

It was a big railroad yard
With trains lined up across many sets of tracks.

We asked a yard worker
If he knew of any trains bound for Chicago.

He pointed to one just leaving the yard.

We ran alongside an open boxcar
And jumped aboard bound for Chicago!

Little did we know the railroad worker was mistaken.

The train's destination was Milwaukee not Chicago.

But in our ignorance, we were filled with joy.

Riding the rails across the beautiful state of Wisconsin
With not a care in the world
Completely unaware
We were headed in the wrong direction.

And even if we had known
We were unable to do anything about it.

What a sight we were on a street in Milwaukee
Grubby from the dirt and dust

Asking a passerby, "Excuse me, are we in Chicago?"

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But such is life . . . isn't it?

We're told to take this or that train
We make our choice, climb aboard

And find ourselves
Riding on the freight train of life
Barreling toward the wrong destination.

Jesus has something to say about this
In today's Scripture Lesson

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We move into the epilog
Of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

From here to the close of the sermon
Jesus addresses the theme of choice.

The subject of choice runs through the Bible.

From the very beginning of creation
God gave humans the freedom to choose.

Genesis 2:16 NIV

¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are FREE to eat from any tree in the garden

In another passage the Lord declares

Deuteronomy 11:26-28 (NLT)

²⁶ “Look, today I am giving you the choice between a blessing and a curse! ²⁷ You will be blessed if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today.

²⁸ But you will be cursed if you reject the commands of the Lord your God and turn away from him and worship gods you have not known before.

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The early Christian document, the Didache
Puts it this way:

There are two ways, one of life and one of death. And between the two, there is great difference.

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All of us start out in life
With the healthy desire for a good life

A life of happiness
Meaning, purpose, love and security.

The question is
Which path do we choose toward these goals?

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It's like the movie Trains, Planes, and Automobiles
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0M0FfQzSngM>

Broad is the path that leads to destruction.

We make choices today
Without thinking of its far-reaching consequences.

Many follow the path of least resistance
The easy way
The way many choose to follow

And find themselves, at best
Following a path of mediocrity

And, at worst
A path leading to destruction.

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A drunken man got on a bus late one night
Staggered up the aisle
And sat down next to a woman
Clutching her Bible.

She looked him up and down and said

“Mister, I’ve got news for you
You’re going straight to hell!”

The drunk jumped up out of his seat and shouted
“Driver, I’m on the wrong bus.”

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Narrow is the way that leads to life and few find it.

In others words
Anything worth achieving has a narrow entrance.

Anything worthwhile requires effort.

All things good entail discipline.

Take the doctor, the athlete, the musician, the artist
Anyone who wants to excel at anything
Requires discipline, lots and lots of it.

Not too many choose to follow that way, it's not easy.

Robert Frost's poem

“Two Roads Diverged in a Yellow Wood”
Speaks about making choices

The poem is about a hiker who comes upon two paths
One path is well traveled
The other less so.

The poem speaks to me of the choices we make.

Yes, we can follow the well-worn path
That most everyone else follows
That leads to pretty-much nowhere

Or we can choose to follow the less-worn path
A path not many are willing to take
But a path that leads to a purpose-filled life.

The choice to follow Jesus
Though it may not promise the easy way
Is the way that leads to life.

Frost ends his poem

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

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But so often we make a choice
And don't immediately see
The consequences of that choice

And so, we continue down its path
Until it seems we can't turn back.

Like our experience riding the rails.

Even if we'd known we were headed the wrong way
There's no stopping a train that leads to destruction

For the high-school girl who finds herself pregnant

For the husband hooked on pornography

For the corporate executive caught in inside trading

For the gambler, rambler, back-biter

The habitual gossip
The self-centered narcissist
The chronic complainer

We're aware of our waywardness
But can't seem to find a way out.

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It's like being out in the middle of nowhere
Completely lost.

And you stop at an old run-down gas station
And you ask the gruff proprietor for directions.

He sees how far off the beaten path you've come
And he knows just how hard it will be
To give directions to get you home

And he simply shakes his head and says
"You can't get there from here!"

The Good News of Jesus Christ is
You CAN get there from here.

The wonderful thing about Jesus
Is that no matter how lost you think you are

No matter how far you've traveled in the wrong direction
And how difficult it is to find the right road

Jesus knows where you are and says, Yes
You CAN get there from here.

Because from him, in him, through him and with him
We find our way to redemption.

When asked by the disciple, Thomas

John 14:5 CEB

⁵ “Lord, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way?”

Jesus declares boldly

John 14:6a CEB

⁶ “I am the way, the truth, and the life.

Isaiah foretold it

Isaiah 35:8 CEB

⁸ A highway will be there. It will be called The Holy Way. The unclean won't travel on it, but it will be for those walking on that way. Even fools won't get lost on it

Jesus also said to Thomas

John 14:6b CEB

⁶No one comes to the Father except through me.

Jesus, in his own words

Tells us that he is the way, the truth, and the life.

He is sharing what he knows

About his relationship with God

And he invites us to follow him on that path.

Now, I understand that this statement

Can be challenging for some people.

We want to be inclusive and not exclusive.

But Jesus isn't trying to exclude anyone.

Rather, Jesus' claim is about pointing us

Towards the boundless love and grace of God.

That love is available to everyone

And I believe it's through Jesus

That we experience it most fully.

It's like my relationship with my doctor.

I go to him and he tells me I have high BP.

I go home and go online and goggle

And read what I can on high blood pressure.

The very next time I go to Facebook or YouTube

There're three trillion ads all telling me

I need their product to lower my BP.

My doctor tells me to cut back on certain foods
Find ways to relieve stress
And take a mild dose of BP medicine.

There's a lot of voices out there
Vying for my spiritual loyalty

I compare them with my doctor's voice.

In the end, who will I trust?

For me, Jesus is the answer to the question
"How must we be saved?"

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In closing, choosing the narrow way
Means following Jesus
With heart, soul, and mind.

Jesus never said it would be easy.
He did say, he would be with us to the end.

Jesus leads us
To the very heart of God's love and grace.

And so, the next time you see two roads
Diverged in a yellow road
Ask Jesus which one to choose?

Make sure Jesus is the engineer
On the train you choose to hop

Because he'll guide you every day
Keeping you on track
And making sure you find your way.

