
BRIDGES

Today is filled with bridges.

- But not the kind of bridges of which you might normally think.
 - These are not bridges across rivers.
 - These are not bridges across canyons or gorges.
- Still, they are bridges that take from one place to another:
 - from the past to the future;
 - from the old to the new;
 - from who we used to be to who we are and can be now.

Now, if you're looking at or thinking about the texts you might be saying, "I think he's wrong.

- "There weren't any bridges in any of those lessons.
- "What is he talking about?"

But the bridges are there, and I'm going to show them to you.

- We're going to talk about several very important bridges:
 - Important for us as Christians, as followers of JESUS, and as people who are part of GOD's Kingdom and mission in the world.

First, though, I want to talk about one other bridge that is not in the texts.

- Sitting in our presence today are four individuals who will cross a bridge,
 - one that will take them to the next stage of their lives.

Approximately thirteen years ago (you probably don't remember), some adults—parents and sponsors—brought you before GOD and they did the unthinkable.

- They gave you up for adoption. That's right.
- Each of them said, "We want the very best for our child and the best parent they could have is our heavenly FATHER."
- They came and said, "GOD, please adopt our child and make our child YOUR own."
 - Because you see, that's what happens in baptism: the child is put up for adoption.
- And in baptism, GOD says to each of the baptized, "You are MINE."
 - Amazing!

But then something equally amazing happens.

- GOD says, "Though this child is now mine, I am giving her/him back to you to raise as best you are able in the way I want this child raised."
- That's what these adults were doing each time they taught you a table prayer or a bedtime prayer,
 - when they read you a Bible story, gave you a cross, gave you your own Bible,
 - brought you to Sunday school and worship service and confirmation classes.
 - They were keeping a promise they made to GOD.
 - They were walking you down a road that leads to today.

Today is about that bridge.

- The first bridge you will cross into adulthood because, as of today, you are adults in the eyes of the church.
 - You can vote in congregational meetings. (By the way, there's one coming up in a few weeks.)
 - You can serve on the church council.
 - Pretty exciting, isn't it?

But today, your voice is equal to all of these people sitting here.

- Today, in the eyes of the Church, you are an adult.
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This bridge, though, is also about that relationship with GOD.

- Thirteen years ago, your parents and sponsors said they wanted you to have the very best parent of all—GOD.
- They promised to bring you to the services of GOD's house, teach you the LORD's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, and the Ten Commandments.
 - We've done that, haven't we?
 - These folks kept their commitment.

Today, you get to decide.

- Do you want GOD as your heavenly FATHER?
 - Do you want to stay in relationship with GOD?
 - Do you want to continue the baptismal relationship your parents and sponsors made for you more than a decade ago?
 - After today, it is your call.
 - Now you will still be living in your parent's homes for a few more years,
 - and they still have a say in how you live your life.
 - But the day will come when it is all your call.
 - And GOD would love it if when you make your choice, you choose GOD.
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Now those other bridges, the ones I said were in these scripture readings.

- In John 15:27, JESUS tells HIS disciples, *"And you must also testify about me, for you have been with me from the beginning."*
- This is a new stage for the disciples.
 - Up until now, they had just been followers of JESUS, and HE had been the ONE who spoke.
 - Now, though, the message is theirs to carry.
 - They are crossing the bridge from listeners to speakers, followers to witnesses.
 - I asked the confirmands if they had considered reading lessons in church.
 - None of them seemed excited about doing that—yet.

Those who follow JESUS are called to cross the bridge from listening to JESUS to speaking about JESUS.

- And it is more than just reading the lessons in church.
- It's about teaching children and family members. (Yes, parents and sponsors are witnesses.)
- It's talking to neighbors and friends when the opportunity arises.
- It's about telling strangers about what JESUS can offer to them.
 - This bridge moves you from listener to participant.
 - And that can be scary.
 - But we don't move to this new place alone.

We have a leader for what lies across that bridge.

- In John 16:13 JESUS says, *“When HE, the SPIRIT of truth comes, HE will guide you into all truth.”*
- JESUS promises us the HOLY SPIRIT who will direct us toward the truth that can change the world and make it what GOD desires it to be.
- The HOLY SPIRIT will let us know when to speak, and tell us what to say, and show us how to be available and help others,
 - if we just make ourselves available to HIS leading.
- The bridge we can cross today and every day takes us into a closer relationship with the ONE who promises to change our community and our world through our witness to the truth about JESUS.
 - Are you still waiting for the SPIRIT to lead you and tell you what to say?
 - Well, the SPIRIT is already here.

Pentecost is the celebration of the coming of the HOLY SPIRIT.

- Not just remembering what happened 2,000 years ago,
 - but recognizing that it wasn't a one-time thing.
 - It was a bridge that moved the church into a new place and a new way of being.
- On that day, by the SPIRIT's leading, they reached out to people, to lots of people (Thank you, Emily, for reading all those nations to us).
- On that day, by the SPIRIT's leading, they crossed the bridge from being a small itinerate group to being a powerful, diverse Church.
 - We didn't get to the end of the chapter, but on that day, about 3,000 people were baptized in the name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY SPIRIT.
 - Because they listened to the HOLY SPIRIT.

We have the HOLY SPIRIT.

- We have the promised GUIDE who will direct us to tell others, to invite them to come, and who will lead them through us to the LORD.
- All we have to do is listen.
- All we have to do is open ourselves each day to the SPIRIT's leading.
- All we have to do is to cross the bridge.