

“Bridges”

Matthew 13:31-33 & Romans 8: Select Phrases

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July 26, 2020

Prayer for Understanding Gracious God please help us listen to your good news. Amen

I am grateful to have enjoyed awe inspiring bridges. I have ridden across the Hite Crossing in Utah, bridges on route 1 on the California coast and bridges by waterfalls in Maui. I have rafted under and rode across the New River Gorge bridge. I have ridden my bike and driven my car across the Stillwater Lift bridge and the St. Croix Crossing. I have biked across the Stone Arch and Golden Gate. I have hiked across the Mount Rainer Suspension bridge, Brooklyn Bridge, the Bridge of the Gods between Oregon and Washington, the bridge across Multnomah Falls and the bridge to the Grove of the Patriarchs in Mount Rainer National Park. I have hiked over hundreds of trail bridges, such as this log bridge. Each one of these bridges is unique, enchanting and awe inspiring. Each bridge took me on a journey to fresh experiences. The Trift bridge in Switzerland is on my bucket list.

A bridge is a structure carrying a path across an obstacle. More miraculous than physical bridges are the bridges God creates for us to journey into the Kingdom of God. We live in a time when all the issues and how much needs to be done to address the issues is often overwhelming. Although, there are a variety of perspectives, ideas and proposed solutions. Almost all of us want a bridge across covid-19 to health for everyone, a bridge across racial strife, oppression and dehumanization to equality, love and completeness for all, a bridge across condemning certain sexual orientations or identities to care, support and affirmation of everyone, a bridge across political fighting to joyful harmony, a bridge across abusing the environment to living in synergy with the environment, a bridge across unemployment to meaningful employment, financial scarcity to abundance, a bridge across judgement to understanding, fear to peace, hate to love, grief to reunion, sadness to joy, a bridge across your own specific struggles and voids to fulfillment and abundant life. And many more bridges to get us across all that diminishes life to all that nourishes life. God partners with us in building bridges for every challenge. God is the master bridge builder.

Imagination, hope, love, and prayer are miraculous bridges. One of the ordination questions is, “Will you pray for and seek to serve with imagination.” Imagination is picturing heaven on earth, sensing the coming Kingdom of God, believing that you belong to God, that all of us will be one loving family. Imagination is forming a thought, a feeling, of being a perfect, complete person in synergistic relationship with everyone and the cosmos. Imagination is conceiving the glory that is coming. Imagination is being creative in living into shalom.

Sometimes the issues, problems, setbacks, suffering, diminishes our imagination. The magnitude of the brokenness conceals our imagination. Like the sun shining above the fog, even though one cannot perceive it, imagination is always there. When we come to a chasm, deflated that it is impossible to get across, imagination reveals a way.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans in a place where the world’s problems were converging, at a time when everything was falling apart, people were struggling in a vortex of political storms. The Apostle Paul wrote to people who were overwhelmed, fatigued, burned out, at the end of the rope, people who could not see a way out of their dismal, deteriorating situation, people who were a lightning rod for everything that was going wrong.

Romans 8:Select Phrases NLT “What we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory God will reveal to us later. Creation looks forward to the day when it will join God’s children in glorious freedom from death and decay. We were given this hope when we were saved. The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we do not know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. God who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us in harmony with God’s own will. Can anything ever separate us from Christ’s love? Does it mean God no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loves us. I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Today we ordain and install elders and deacons who strive to share imagination with everyone. Imagination that gives us glimpses of the coming glory during our suffering. Imagination that enables us to journey across a bridge infinitely grander than the Thrift bridge even though one has only ever actually crossed over a mere log bridge.

Hope grows as we embrace total forgiveness, savor experiences of salvation and swim in the oceans of grace. Hope is a confident expectancy, that with God's guidance, you will get to all that you imagine.

Prayer comforts, heals, sustains, encourages, and motivates. Prayer is communication with God. Key aspects of prayer are listening and receiving. Prayer transforms us. God molds, sculpts, and shapes us through prayer. The Holy Spirit helps us pray constantly nourishing us with love, hope, peace, grace, joy, and every goodness. The Holy Spirit is the cosmos' life force filling us with energy with every breath. The Holy Spirit takes our feelings and translates them into prayer. The Holy Spirit interprets thoughts that are emerging even before we are aware of them.

Prayer has sustained, challenged, and transformed me. I am aware of numerous times when the Holy Spirit has interpreted my feelings and replied with nourishment. Recalling moments of prayer often is a bridge from negative to positive thoughts, from desperation to expectancy of healing. The joy of tossing Spencer and Abigail up in the air as we sang every time I get down God lifts me up. I recall these moments when life seems arduous for it is bridge to joyful gratitude. The love of walking with Leslie on a rocky colorful beach with a vibrant rainbow on the horizon. I recall these moments when I am grumpy for it is a bridge to love. The peace that came after weeks of frustration, grief, suffering, debate, anger, as my mom lingered in hospice. I recall that moment when I am overwhelmed for it is a bridge to peaceful expectancy of resurrection. The joy of laying under a towering western red cedar tree during a downpour, with wind and lighting. I was enveloped in the calm, dry shelter of the tree, every synapse in harmony with God. Joy flowed into me. I recall that joyful moment when I wake up in the middle of the night from the pain of my arthritis and angry hip for it is a bridge to restful, rejuvenation. Each moment has a bridge to paradise. Prayer invigorates your imagination, solidifies your hope, and magnifies your love.

Love is the agent, catalyst, medium, spark, means that propels you across the bridge. Love transforms all. Years ago, a sociology professor at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore assigned his class to a city slum to interview 200 boys. "On the basis of your findings, predict their future." Shocked at what they saw in the slums, the students estimated that 90 percent of the boys interviewed would someday serve time in prison. Twenty years later the same professor asked another class to locate the survivors of the 200 boys and compare what happened. Of the 180 boys they could find, only four had ever been to jail. Why had the predictions by the earlier class proven false? A common denominator — over 100 of them remembered having the same high-school teacher, Miss O'Rourke, who had been a tremendous influence on them. After a long search, Sheila O'Rourke was found in a nursing home in Memphis. When asked for her explanation she was puzzled and replied, "All I did was love every one of them." Love is a bridge that carries all across every void.

God always provides a bridge. The fictitious movie featuring Indian Jones depicts how often a leap of faith bridges our chasms. There is always a metaphorically step we can take to land safe on the unseen bridges God provides.

Listen for the bridges of imagination, hope, prayer, and love in Jesus parables. **Matthew 13:31-33 "Jesus put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in their field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." Jesus also used this illustration: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a person used in making bread. Even though they put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeated every part of the dough."**

A person imagined the mustard plant and bread. They had hope that the seed will grow, the bread will rise. Prayer magnified the growth of the seed into a tree and the yeast into nourishing bread. Love inspires to till the soil, buy the seed, plant the seed, weed, water, and protect the growing plant. Love inspires to buy the yeast, mix the ingredients, knead the dough, cook the bread, and share the nourishing bread.

Amid brokenness we are called to plant and nourish a seed, to cook and share bread, to help others discover the bridges to wholeness. In the midst of our problems we are called to imagine, hope, pray and love to enable all of us to journey across the bridges to solutions.

God often magnifies a minuscule action producing extravagant results. When you feel overwhelmed take one small step across a bridge, add a thought or do an act of kindness. Each step we take brings heaven to earth.

Bill Gates said. "Headlines, in a way, are what mislead you because bad news is a headline and gradual improvement is not." Portraying the chasm sells. God provides a bridge for every chasm.

It is highly unlikely that we are going to solve all the challenges that we face today, however God is eager to help us make progress on all of them. Whenever you feel overwhelmed imagine bridges and take one step across the chasm.

Listen for the bridges in Romans 8 this time from the Message translation. **Romans 8:Select Phrases MSG “I don’t think there is any comparison between the present hard times and the coming good times. Meanwhile, the joyful anticipation deepens. The difficult times of pain throughout the world are simply birth pangs. But it is not only around us; it is within us. The Spirit of God is arousing us within. We are yearning for full deliverance. Meanwhile, the moment we get tired in the waiting, God’s Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don’t know how or what to pray, it does not matter. God does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. God knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God. That is why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good. Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ’s love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing. I’m absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely nothing can get between us and God’s love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us. Amen**