

Sermon: Bridge Builders
Scripture: Acts 1:21-26, John 17:6-19
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Our first Scripture reading comes from Acts 1:21-26. Luke the evangelist, the author of the Acts of the Apostles, begins the fifth book of the New Testament where the gospel of Luke left off, which is Christ's Ascension into heaven. Today being the 7th and last Sunday of Easter, also being a Sunday after the ascension of the Lord's day, let us look at what took place following Christ's ascension in the Bible. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

²¹ So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.” ²³ So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴ Then they prayed and said, “Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen ²⁵ to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” ²⁶ And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles. Amen.

Our second reading is continuing from where we left off from last Sunday's gospel reading, starting from John 17:12 through verse 19. This passage retells the last moments before Jesus is betrayed, arrested, tortured, and dies on the cross. The gospel shares Jesus' intercessory prayer for his disciples as he anticipates his role after his ascension. Let us hear the prayer of our High Priest, who continues to cover us with the same prayer. Listen now the Word of the Lord.

¹² While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³ But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. ¹⁴ I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁵ I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Once upon a time, two brothers who lived on adjoining farms. They were the best of friends and would share everything together. Then, one day there was an argument between the two brothers and they stopped speaking to one another. For many years, not a word was spoken between them.

One morning, one of the brothers was at his house when a carpenter came to his door and said, "I'm looking for some work," he said. "Perhaps you have a few small jobs here and there that I can do?" The brother thought for a moment and then replied, "I do have a job for you. Look across the creek at that farm. That's my neighbor. In fact, it's my brother. I want you to build me a fence - an 8-foot fence - so I won't need to see his place anymore. I'm going into town and I'll be back this evening."

When he came back that evening, he was shocked to see that the carpenter had not followed his instructions. There was no fence there. Instead, there was a bridge stretching from one side of the creek to the other! As they were inspecting the bridge, his brother walked toward him from the other side. His brother said, "After all the terrible things I've done to you over the years, I can't believe that you would build a bridge and welcome me back." He reached out to his brother and gave him a big hug.

They turned to see the carpenter hoist his toolbox on his shoulder. "Can you stay? I have more work for you to do," he asked. "I'd love to stay on," the carpenter said, "but I have many more bridges to build."

This story, like today's passage, shows us how Jesus is the supreme architect and builder of bridges. Jesus, who is the truth, the way, and the life, has built the bridges over which we must cross if we are to reach our eternal, heavenly home. The difference between the story and the gospel, however, is the ending. Jesus, unlike the carpenter in the story, does not hoist his toolbox on his shoulder, but rather equips us with the Word of God in our hands and fitted our feet with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.² We are called to be bridge builders ourselves, to be Christ's hands and feet, to share the love and peace of Christ, to mend the brokenhearted, to proclaim the saving death of our risen Lord.

As there are many types of bridges around the world to address each context and unique situations, we also need to be prepared to build different types of bridges in our lives as well as around us. There are couple types of bridges we can learn from today's passage, and we will start with the bridge of obedience.

What is amazing about how the book of Acts begins is that these unruly disciples of Christ actually follows Jesus' command for once. As Jesus spent his 40 days after resurrection – convincing and speaking of the kingdom of God – he told the disciples to not leave Jerusalem until they are baptized with the Holy Spirit. So that is what they are doing. The disciples and the women – including Mary the mother of Jesus³ – once again

¹ Author unknown. Variation of this story can be found on the internet. Arrangement is mine.

² Ephesians 6:13-17, spiritual armor of God.

³ Acts 1:14

find themselves in an upper room, in Jerusalem. It might be the exact same room where the disciples were hiding immediately following the crucifixion of Christ with locked door, where Christ came through to prove to Thomas that it is indeed him with his nail marks in his hands and pierced side. It would be meaningful to receive the Holy Spirit and start the first church as Christ as the head of the body where all this took place, but that is my biblical imagination. There is, however, a different feel to their waiting in this upper room the second time around.

One thing I am sure of, although it is not spelled out in the Bible, is that nothing changed in their surrounding circumstances. What I mean by that is there are those who are still looking for them, wanting to wipe them out. Just because 40 days has passed, it does not mean that they have been removed from the *most wanted* list. So what changed? It is a change of heart. They have learned to build a bridge of obedience in their hearts.

After witnessing the ascension of Christ, they saw the completion of the prophecies long told. They have re-membered, both re-collected and re-assembled, why and how Jesus accomplished his ministry – by being obedient to the Father, to the point of death on the cross. So, the first Act of the Apostles, pun intended, was to obey the Son of God.

It is a battle every day in the Choi household, to make my children to listen and obey what Sophia and I request of them. I have been repeatedly told that this battle has only just began and it is an uphill battle. Some dare to tell me it is a losing battle. What Diana and Zachariah does not understand is that it is not always for our benefit but mostly for their benefit that they should listen to us. As children of God, just imagine the joy and pride that our heavenly Father would have in us when we show that we have grown out of childish ways and matured to understand and trust God's wisdom, as we would and have felt in our own children or watching our spiritual children grow in this very community. Friends, we who are looking forward to Pentecost next Sunday, excitedly waiting for the remembrance of the Spirit that has endowed upon us, let us be like the disciples who are waiting for that same anointing in today's passage: let us build a bridge of obedience in our hearts.

Quickly, I will go over the second type of bridge from today's passage, and it is a bridge of prayer. In the gospel of John, Jesus as the high priest prays for his disciples and for the disciples to follow. It is a prayer that does not have expiration date and is still effective to cover you and me. We need to build the bridge of prayer within us, with one another, and most importantly to the Lord our God.

Many consider hymns and Christian songs as a communal prayer. One hymn that is both a prayer and praise in my life is How Great Thou Art. For me, it covers every aspect of life's journey and hope for the eternal, praying and telling my soul that it will be so.

Oh Lord, my God

When I, in awesome wonder

Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder
Thy power throughout the universe displayed

And when I think that God, His Son not sparing
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing
He bled and died to take away my sin

When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart
Then I shall bow, in humble adoration
And then proclaim, my God, how great Thou art

We serve a great, mighty God. Our God is a mighty fortress in time of need as well as an awesome God that must be admired in the times of joy and wonder. Let us rely on God, stay connected with the One who first loved us, by building a bridge of prayer. Let us emulate the act of Jesus by lifting up an intercessory prayer for others. Let us pray and let our souls sing to the Lord, to our Savior God, praising how great thou art, how great indeed. Amen.