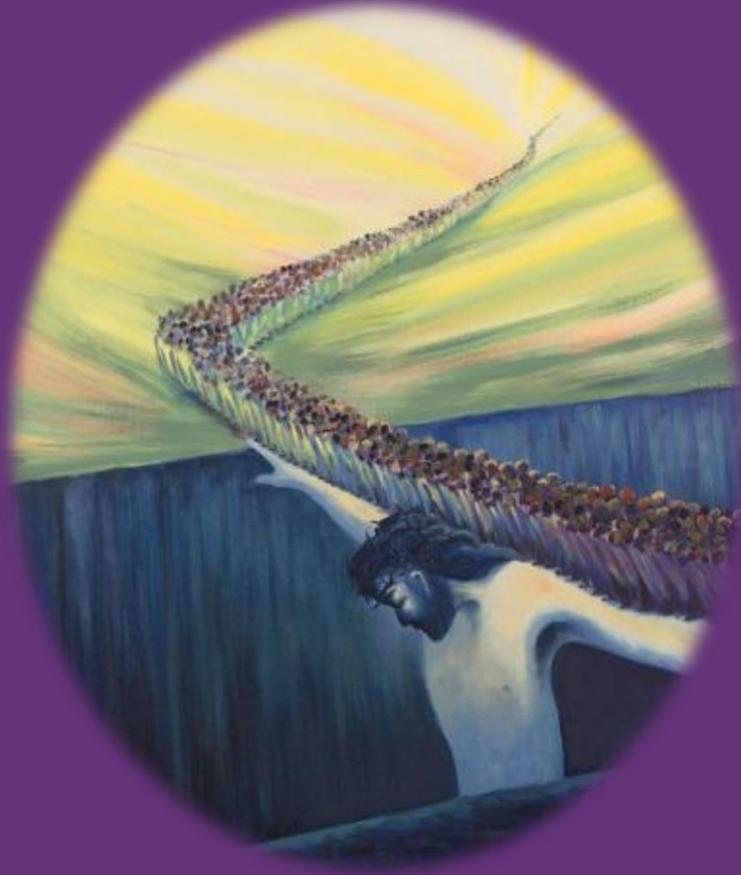


“BRIDGES”



Reflections for the Season of Lent
2018

The West Virginia Institute for Spirituality
Charleston, West Virginia

Ash Wednesday
February 14, 2018

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will set your paths straight. Proverbs 3: 5-6



“Building Bridges”

Today is Ash Wednesday. We have a special Lenten focus as we begin this season of contemplation, setting our hearts toward Jesus’ march to Jerusalem, the cross and resurrection. We practice the giving of alms, fasting and abstinence. We pray for our community, our churches, our nation and missions. This is an opportunity for us to pray together that God would pour out His Spirit. We are His means of connection to people who are in need of compassion and restoration. Building bridges is about intentionally offering ourselves to God as we minister to one another. We work to be bridge builders to our world. We must be willing to reach out and develop a servant spirit. We want to look objectively into our own lives through the lens of Scripture, and recognize opportunities to cultivate and demonstrate a servant’s spirit in our ability to serve.

PRAYER PRACTICE: When we travel through our day...walking, running, driving...invite the Spirit to help us see people as He does. We pray ... Heavenly Father, help us to be better than we are now. Teach us to be more like you and less like the world around us. Help us to put aside our selfish desires and vain ambitions. Teach us to be true servants in Word and deed. Give us a servant’s heart. In Jesus’ name we pray.
Amen

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February 15, 2018

When I was eight years old, I saw Malcom X on the TV news. He was advocating segregation between the races. He wanted part of the state of Mississippi to be a separate nation for African-Americans. When I heard Malcolm X's words, his words burned into my heart. I knew at the age of eight that I was going to Urban America to be a bridge person to the African-American culture.

How does one build bridges to such a group? The Apostle Paul gives us the answer in I Cor. 20-23: "To the Jews I became a Jew, so that I could win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those under the law. To those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so I may save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I many become a fellow partake of it."

To build a bridge between warring factions, one needs to become that bridge by becoming the other side. For me that meant "To the African-American, I had to become African-American...." [On the surface, does that not sound arrogant?] The motivation to become that bridge is found in the above passage. The Apostle Paul became a bridge person "for the sake of the gospel" (v. 23). At this time of my life, I decided to learn the gospel. What is the gospel? The Apostle Paul writes later in this letter what the gospel (or good news) is: "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel" (I Cor. 15:1). What is the summation of the gospel? It is found just a few verses later: "For I delivered to you as of first importance [NOTE WHAT THE APOSTLE IS SAYING—HE IS SAYING THAT WHAT HE IS GOING TO SHARE IS THE ESSENCE OF THE GOSPEL OR GOOD NEWS] (I Cor. 15:3). What is the essence of the Gospel? Essence of the gospel part one is: "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" [throughout the New Testament when one finds the phrase "according to the Scriptures" one finds that this is a quote from the Old Testament. This is not a quote from the Old Testament—WHAT THIS IS, IS NOT A QUOTE FROM A PARTICULAR PASSAGE FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT, BUT A SUMMARY OF THE ENTIRE OLD TESTAMENT!!!!] (I Cor. 15: 3). Essence of the gospel part two is: "that He was buried and that He was raised on the third day according to the scriptures" [throughout the New Testament when one find the phrase "according to the Scriptures" one finds that this is a quote from the Old Testament—WHAT THIS IS, IS NOT QUOTE FROM A PARTICULAR PASSAGE FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT, BUT A SUMMARY OF THE ENTIRE OLD TESTAMENT!!!!] (I Cor. 15:4). I learned the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ—The Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the whole Bible and that the Lord Jesus was raised according to the whole Bible. I knew as a child I was to be a bridge person to the African-American people by becoming African-American. I knew as a child that I would be such a bridge person on the motivation only of knowing the gospel of the Lord Jesus—that Christ died for our sins and that Christ was raised from the dead.

I went to Philadelphia to go to Seminary. By God's grace I was ordained within a Black Pentecostal denomination. By God's grace I was able to start three Black Pentecostal churches. I became that bridge person. However, a surprise happened to me. The people with whom I worked became a bridge to me. They became a bridge that I did not anticipate. The people with whom I worked became a bridge to me so that I could know God in ways I never expected. I thought that I was going to be a bridge. They became a bridge to me. I am overwhelmed with gratitude.

Paul Bricker

February 16, 2018
Friday after Ash Wednesday

This, rather, is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting freed the oppressed, breaking every yoke; sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own. Then your light shall break forth like the dawn... (IS 58)

In this time of political and social struggles concerning immigration, women's rights, health care, and the right to life at all stages of life, the above quote from Isaiah is the perfect answer; and one that challenges me to do more. This is what God wants for all peoples everywhere. If we consider ourselves followers of Christ, Abraham, Mohammed, Buddha, or any other religious persuasion in our country, these words should ring true in our minds and hearts.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

If we find ourselves lacking with regard to the above quote, we could pray with the Psalm Response for today: "My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit; a heart contrite and humbled, O God, you will not spurn."

What bridge can each one of us build to live out the clarion cry of the prophet Isaiah so that our country, world can be more loving for and accepting of all peoples?



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