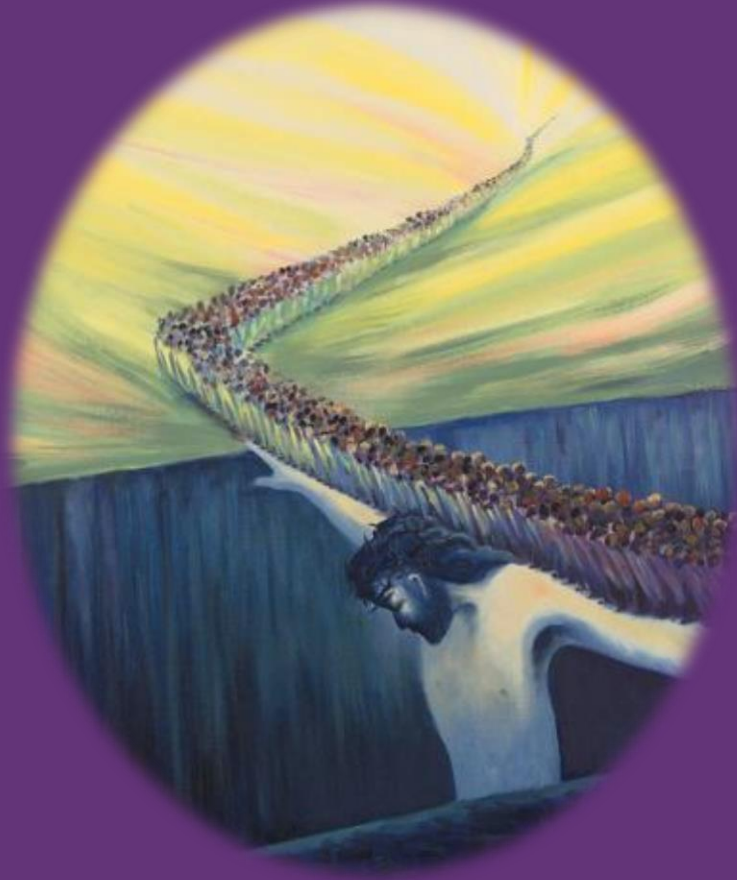


“BRIDGES”



Reflections for the Season of Lent
2018

The West Virginia Institute for Spirituality
Charleston, West Virginia

March 3, 2018

The Lord is kind and merciful. He pardons all your iniquities, he heals all your ills. He redeems your life from destruction, he crowns you with kindness and compassion. Psalm 103

One lazy afternoon shortly after the turn of the New Year, I was sitting in the common parlor of our apartment building feeling sorry for myself. The bitter cold of the winter weather and the perceived coldness of life were taking their toll. And then I noticed the warmth of the bright sun shining on my face and the squirrels and birds scampering in the park outside. Glimmers of hope.

I'm thinking of the glimmers of hope for Lent. What comes to mind is how I can be a better bridge builder through the graces of Lent. Bridge to what? I like the idea of the bridge to contemplative and peace-filled living Thomas Merton describes in his many writings.

Merton says that in Lent the Lord should be showing Himself to us in His mercy. The purpose of Lent is not only the expiation, to satisfy the divine justice, but above all is a preparation to rejoice in His love. And this preparation consists in receiving the gift of his mercy. (*Seasons of Celebration*). Then to give it away.

So, how I can be a stronger bridge builder during Lent? Perhaps I need to simply focus on my state of life as it is now and how I can use my gifts and talents to bridge – as a Spiritual Director, a friend and companion, an active member of the local Twelve Step community or my church family. It's quite simple. I have all the tools I need. Thus, "Bridge to what?" no longer needs to be a question.

Prayer Practice: Try meditating on the beginning lines of poetry I wrote in the parlor that lazy sunny afternoon: "Sun shines bright and warms my heart through parlor windows, perhaps a start of winter's end as robins romp, and squirrels scamper in the park...."

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March 4, 2018

*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son,
That whoever believes in Him, shall not perish, but have everlasting life.*

John 3:16

As I look back over this 3rd full week of Lent, I start with Sunday, often called “Laetare Sunday.” Laetare meaning “to rejoice.” Many churches, both Protestant and Catholic, celebrate Laetare Sunday as a day of relaxation from normal Lenten rigors. It is also a day of hope that Easter, at last, is within sight. It is a day of Resurrection Hope.

Resurrection Hope...

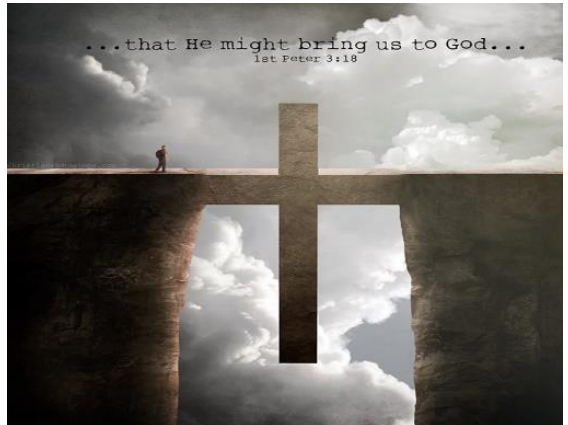
That’s what I think of when I think of John 3:16. “For God *so-o-o-o* loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son...” Try as I might, I can’t even fathom that much love. But the Resurrection Hope is: “that whoever believes in Him, shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” I can’t really fathom that either, but I can take it on faith... that someday I, you, we will share in eternal life with our God. And THAT is something “to rejoice” about! That is something to believe in. That is a shared relationship I want to deepen, right now. That is worth a lifetime of prayer, listening for what He is calling me to do in His salvation plan. For He is the bridge.

Prayer Practice:

Spend a few minutes today in quiet solitude pondering: what does “Resurrection Hope” mean to you.

Then, ask God, what does it means to Him.

And then, how has He been, and how is He now, your bridge.



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March 5, 2018

From the Gospel According to Luke 4:24-30
“No Prophet is accepted in his own native place.”

Jesus speaks of the difficulty in reaching those who know you intimately, those who have history with you, those who’s past are tightly ingrained in your past. It is difficult to explain the change you might have had in relationship with God and now wish to impart to others, but because of that close relationship, you can’t elicit a response other than maybe no response. You are not accepted in your own native place.

So often in our own families and close circle of friends we seek to convert or influence them to our way of thinking or believing about God and salvation, but it seems as though they ignore us or minimize us. We need to understand that this is our short coming, not theirs. All that we need to do is to witness to our new relationship with God and just as old history has been an influence, this new relationship with God will come at a time God chooses. We just need to be that gentle bridge to the Divine Relationship that they will see.

Prayer Practice for the Day:

Pray for patience today, that we may allow God to do God’s work through our witness of happiness and joy. That those who we come in contact with today will be moved to deepen their relationship with the Creator through us and maybe even in spite of us.

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March 6, 2018

No matter what happens or how I feel, I just want to trust You, Lord.

Merton

Daily life is sometimes like living in a fiery furnace: worry, fear, selfishness, disappointments, discouragements, setbacks, change of plans, change of anything sometimes produces more of the same, turning up the heat.

There are the sufferings and hardships imposed by the demands of living together. There are the misinformed and misguided decisions of those in authority. Such as the three men in the fiery furnace. They sought the fire of God's love and were unharmed.

Praise, gratitude, trust in God and hearing/doing (obedience) God's word are some of the tools given us to survive and grow "bridges" to guide us out of the fires. Notice what ones touch you, igniting the fire of God's love with in you:

+Daniel 3:52-90 –God dwells in the praises of his people

+Matthew 28:20- God is faithful. "I am with you always".

+1 Peter 5:7 - Cast your cares upon the Lord and he will support you.

+Isaiah 41: 10 – Do not fear for I am with you. Do not be dismayed for I am God. I will strengthen you and help you.

+Mark 4: 35-41 – Calm me, Lord, as you calmed the storm. Enfold me in love, keep me in peace.

+Hebrews 5:8 – Jesus Learned obedience through what he suffered and endured.

Prayer Practice: If you want to go deeper and expand your awareness of God and his power to restore you to wellbeing, notice what word or phrase touches you. Carry it with you throughout the day. Notice its impact and invitation.

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March 7, 2018

"So watch yourself about complaining, Sister," Maya Angelou, black American writer quotes her mother. "What you're supposed to do when you don't like a thing is change it. If you can't change it, change the way you think about it. Don't complain" (Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now).

To develop the theme of Bridges, I've been researching and discovered a Canadian publication that I recommend to you. In Bridges in Spirituality, Gladys Taylor Cook remembers this: "An important learning from my mother was to turn things around into the positive ... Be positive. Look at things in a different perspective. Hope everything will be all right."

It is apparent, reading the collected wisdom of the five First Nations women presented in "Bridges of Spirituality, first women tell their stories, that marginalized people of different races share many profound understandings. All five -- Sarah Simon (Dene), Jessie Saulteaux (Nakota), Gladys McCue Taylor (Ojibwa), Gladys Taylor Cook (Dakota) and Vi Smith (Gitksan) -- demonstrate the spiritual strength, creativity and compassion of people who have lived long and discerningly through uncertain conditions and conflicting cultural values. (google 'morning star quilt')

Each woman speaks in her own voice with all the characteristics and particularities that implies. Each is a unique cultural bridge -- linking the traditional spirituality of the native ethos out of which she has come and blending that with the Christian faith she claims. Her own people, her church and society-at-large has honored each.

Gracing the book's cover is the image of a morning star quilt. The design is from the Dakota tradition. It appears at times of birth, death and other community celebrations. Like creation itself, this image suggests our interconnectedness. All have been given a gift and a place. Our life task is to discover and use both. "Choose what is important to you," says Vi Smith, who links the testimony of all those recognized here. "Work your piece of the whole weaving."

Personally, I found these stories inspiring and brought to my mind the Appalachian women of our times and graduates of WVIS, Mary Lee Dougherty, Ann Nash, Gertrude Englert, Anna Carruli and Sr. Dorothy O'Brien...all women who integrated their own gifts, cultural tradition and assimilated the Appalachian culture in order to make a difference.

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March 8, 2018

Listen to my voice; then I will be your God and you shall be my people.
Jeremiah 7:23



We yearn to belong, to be heard, and to participate. Listening is vital to effective communication. Communication is the bridge that connects us to God and one another. God invites us to *be still and know that I am God* (Psalm 46:10). When we listen with open and humble hearts, God speaks to our deepest longings. *Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine* (Isaiah 43:1). Jesus is the Good Shepherd (John 10) come to fulfill God's promise: *The lost I will search out, the strays I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, and the sick I will heal* (Ezekiel. 34:16). His mission is universal. *Bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone, whom I created* (Isaiah 43:6-9). Jesus states in Luke 11:23, *whoever does not gather with me scatters*. As Christ's followers, we too work to gather people into God's love through our words and deeds. James 1:19-21 urges us to be *quick to hear and slow to speak and slow to wrath for the wrath of a man does not accomplish the righteousness of God*. Words spoken rashly, without listening, scatter and injure people like shards of a shattered dish carelessly dropped. During Lent I pray for God's grace to help me to be mindful of my words--are they life affirming? To let others talk first while I listen for understanding; when I am angry, to count to ten and take a few deep breaths before speaking; to explore creative ways to reduce stress through music, movement, and nature.

Prayer Practice:

Take three cleansing breaths. Listen for God's voice. By what name does God call you? What healing does God offer you? Prayerfully consider a concrete step you might take to gather someone into God's love today.

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March 9, 2018

Listen carefully: Unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, dead to the world, it is never any more than a grain of wheat. But if it is buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over. In the same way, anyone who holds on to life just as it destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in your love, you'll have it forever, real and eternal. John 12:24, *The Message*

The ivory moon hangs in the night sky, full, mysterious, lovely. I stare in awe and delight as I drive home. Every night this week I pause to watch the moon wane, its beauty and mystery diminishing, sliver by sliver. There's a field recently plowed that I note as I maneuver the curves of Highway 11. For some reason unknown to me, the tiller of this field has left a patch of beige-brown weeds withering in the center of the field. This week small green shoots break through the soil while the weedy tendrils in the unplowed center droop closer and closer to the earth in the act of dying. This is nature's way – a rhythmic waxing and waning, blooming and withering.

As Jesus approaches the cross, he tells his disciples that it is necessary for a seed to fall into the earth and die for new growth to occur. The Philosopher of Ecclesiastes says, "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted..." We are time-bound creatures created in the image of God and given a great gift by the One who loves us: the gift of this day. Tomorrow is not promised, and yesterday is past with all that we did and left undone. In this season of Lent, a discipline that will bring us closer to God is choosing to live the gift of this day with gratitude. A prayer for you by a young Serbian refugee...

I will not die an un-lived life.
I will not live in fear
of falling or catching fire.
I choose to inhabit my days,
to allow my living to open me,
to make me less afraid,
more accessible.
to loosen my heart
until it becomes a wing,
a torch, a promise.
I choose to risk my significance;
to live so that which came to me as seed
goes to the next as blossom
and that which came to me as blossom,
goes on as fruit. Amen.

Prayer practice: In the light of an ivory moon, join the young Serbian poet in her prayer of gratitude.

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**If you enjoyed these reflections
join us for
Easter Season Reflections
beginning
Easter Sunday
April 1, 2018**



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Rooted and growing in the light of God's love.

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