

“Bridges”



Reflections for the Seasons of Advent and Christmas
2017-2018

The West Virginia Institute for Spirituality
1601 Virginia Street East
Charleston, WV 25311

December 24, 2017

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.

May it be done to me according to your word." Luke 1: 38

As I considered how the Incarnation connected to our Advent theme of building bridges, I thought of chasms; deep divides that are rocky, painful, dark, steep, dangerous. And, I thought of bridges that make the walking over easier, straighter and safer. A bridge stands in the breach of a great divide.

This is the day that we celebrate Mary's yes. Mary, a bridge that spanned a great divide from the Old Testament God, through Jesus, to the living God within us.

Jackson Browne, in his song titled "Standing in the Breach", expresses a deep passion for the healing of our earth. He sings:

And though the earth may tremble and our foundations crack

We will all assemble and we will build them back

And I rush to save the lives remaining still within our reach

And try to put our world together standing in the breach.

(AZL lyrics.com)

This song passionately expresses the deep desire to stand in the breach wherever one sees creation trembling. I see creation tremble in the lives of those who seek to know God in a deeply personal way and to experience the transformation promised by Love. My passion is to share what I have been given.

We all passionately love some part of this broken creation and feel deeply the same call Mary heard... bring forth God. With her yes, she stood in the breach. With our yes we stand in the breach.

Practice for the day:

Listen to Jackson Browne sing about our call to stand in the breach.

<https://youtu.be/TeErlCbO2mM>.

Reflect: Where am I called to stand in the breach? Offer in prayer, "I am the handmaiden of the Lord. Be it done to me according to your word.

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December 25: The Nativity

“Beloved, the grace of God has appeared.”

(Ti 2:11; Midnight Mass)

As we celebrate today the coming of our God on this earth let us consider thinking of this profound Mystery, God Become Human, in a new way. Richard Rohr says, “ My prayer understanding of Jesus is God Alongside Us, the accompanying God who walks with us, especially through the mystery of death and resurrection, of letting go and receiving...the Paschal Mystery.” (Divine Dance, Rohr, p. 145) Jesus is the Bridge that God built between God’s very self and us – God with flesh on, like us in all ways except sin, so that we would truly know ourselves as God’s beloved.

I am reminded of a memory long held in my heart of my mother walking me to kindergarten my first week of school holding my hand tightly as we crossed Memphis Avenue, a major artery with lots of traffic. I felt safe and gained confidence until I could negotiate it alone. Fast forward to the middle of my own children’s late teen years which proved to be challenging and tumultuous, demanding my letting go of fear and moving forward with trust. I remembered this image of my mother’s hand guiding me across Memphis Avenue years before. In my prayer I was led to put my hand in the hand of Jesus to guide me safely across this very busy, scary street of letting my children go. My prayer was, “Even if I let go of you, please don’t let go of ME or my children.” The Bridge of Jesus’ hand holding onto mine and my children’s brought peace and the courage to move forward as I experienced the dying to self so that my children, each in turn, would be free to become who they are called to be.

I proclaim to you good news of great joy:

“The Grace of God has appeared”: JESUS, GOD ALONG SIDE US.

Prayer Reflection: Think of a time in your life when you experienced God alongside YOU. What was the gift you received? Give thanks.

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December 26, 2017

...You will be given what to say...the Spirit will speak through you...

If you perseverer to the end, you will be saved.

Matthew 10:17-22

Bridges have always fascinated me, growing up in the New Jersey, New York area you were always crossing bridges to get somewhere. The diamond appearance of the Verrazano Narrows Bridge, the work-horse of the George Washington Bridge always full of traffic and congestion and the beautiful bow bridge in Central park. As a child I always asked if we get to the other side. We were so far above the water and the ground. My Dad would reassure me that I was safe and the Bridge was built to do its work of carrying us over to the other side. Now as an adult I realize the beautiful simplicity of these words. God is truly our bridge! No matter what life send us the spirit of God will speak through us, giving us the words to say, the strength to say them, giving us the love to go through hard times.

Love we need to carry on in difficult time and allowing us to rejoice with Him when the hard times are over.

As we journey now through this Christmas time and as we celebrate today the feast of Saint Stephen, the first martyr we need to pray that we will continue to rely on God's infinite help and support. We need to believe the God is taking us and holding us in the palm of his hand and will never let us go or be alone. Enduring to the end we will walk with the Lord over the final bridge to heaven knowing we have lived our life in oneness with the God who loves us more than we will ever know this side of heaven (the bridge).

As I journey today over the bridges of my life may I pray to be aware of the infinite love God has for me.



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December 27, 2017

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (John 4:7)

Jesus, by reaching out to those on the margins of society, was a bridge-builder extraordinaire. In this case he built a bridge to a woman that was his polar opposite. He was a Jew; she a despised Samaritan. Jesus was a man; she a lowly (in that culture) woman. He lived a pure, sinless life; she a morally tainted one so that she chose the blistering heat of midday to draw her water, rather than risk the condemnation and gossip of the "righteous" women of the village who came to draw water in the cool of the morning. None of these differences mattered to Jesus. Meeting her need and deepest desire was his only concern and motivation.

After "retiring" from academia in 2016, this past June I began working part-time in a new area of nursing with a team of professionals who love to complain about management—at every gathering. Underneath the negativity, I see their pain of and frustration with life, revealing itself by blaming outward circumstances. How do I build a bridge to these women that will allow me a hearing to speak of a God who delights in them?

A young mother with whom I meet regularly (as a friend, not as a Spiritual Director) is struggling with her second year of treatment for depression and spiritual desolation with anger toward her husband, God, her supervisor—and herself. How do I build a bridge into her life, sharing the good news that she can "let go" of her incessant drive to "do something" to gain God's favor?

Please join me today in praying for all of our bridge-building needs:

Lord Jesus Christ, Master bridge-builder,

Help me to
See with your eyes,
Hear with your ears,
Speak with your words and
Love with your love.

May I be a light
For those in darkness,
Life-giving water
For those who are dry, and
A beacon of hope
For those in despair.

Amen.

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December 28, 2017

Do nothing out of selfishness. Have the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped.

Philippians 2:1-6 (Excerpts; NABRE)

Joseph took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. He stayed there until the death of Herod. When Herod realized that he had been deceived by the magi, he became furious. He ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under. Matthew 2:14-16 (Excerpts; NABRE)

REFLECTION

Jesus' life, death, and resurrection form the bridge and reveal the way to authentic living in communion with God, creation, and one another. God invites us to participate in the dynamic, loving relationship of the Trinity and to mirror that mutuality of love, respect, and humility in our daily interactions and relationships with others. How do my attitudes and actions reflect my response to God's invitation to bridge-building? Like Herod, there are moments when I react with hostility. I want to protect my domain. I micro-manage my family and cling to my opinions. I avoid change. Like Joseph, there are times when I respond to God's call with trust and participate in works of mercy: serving food to the homeless, listening to people's stories, and offering comfort to the grieving. I pray to be spiritually stretched. In break-through moments, I am moved by the beauty and mystery of God's creation. Like the Magi, I am filled with wonder and awe and seek Christ. I humbly offer the gift of myself.

PRAYER PRACTICE: Consider how the photo might be a metaphor for God's invitation to you. Place yourself in the scene. What are you doing? Where do you see and feel God's presence in this place? Are others present? Is there Silence? Laughter? Tears? Conversation? Activity? Is there someone you wish would join you? Close with the Our Father.



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December 29, 2017

*“Every house is built by someone, of course;
but God built everything that exist.”* Hebrews 3: 4-5

Bridges

When I think of bridges, I think of spanning over obstacles or making connections.

Jesus became man to give us a bridge to our heavenly Father.

We try to build bridges between ourselves and others, between our head and our heart, and between our good resolutions and accomplishing them. By our ministry we try to help others build bridges to God.

When I was young I felt called to become a Catholic priest. I had to build many bridges before I was ordained. In my 51 years of priestly ministry I have worked and prayed to build spiritual bridges in the different churches I served in.

What is your call? What is your dream? What bridges do you need to make?

Fr. David Glockner

Priest

Holy Redeemer Church



December 30, 2017

*If you hug to yourself any resentment against anybody else,
you destroy the bridge by which God would come to you.*

- Peter Marshall

December 30 is the 364th day of the Gregorian calendar...it's also National Bicarbonate of Soda day. A natural deodorizer, healing agent, cleaner. This is a day to 'let go' of the old year and get ready for New Year's Eve!

How my mind goes! Well, the quote of Peter Marshall says to me, to let go of any resentments or regrets from 2017 as I approach the New year with hope that God will make God self more known and present to me.

Each day represents a 'new year' beginning for me, and as I hug myself in an effort to affirm my self-esteem, my graced existence by God's love.

I think a suspension bridge is the best description of today's 'bridge'. This type of bridge has cables suspended between towers, plus vertical suspender cables that carry the weight of the deck below. Aren't each of us suspended between the now and the not yet of our fulfillment in Christ. Our graced existence 'carries' us; God's love hugs us.

Practice:

Imagine yourself as a suspension bridge held by God's love and grace. Relax, let go of any resentments so that the 2018-year brings only renewed love, strength and grace



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December 31, 2017

... to be a Christian is not to know the answers but to begin to live in the part of the self where the question is born....(to have) an attitude of listening, of awareness of presence, of an openness to mystery."

Wreathed in Flesh

Wendy M. Wright, "Wreathed in Flesh and Warm"
A Book of Christmas, Nashville: Upper Rooms, 1988, p. 35

I was immediately drawn to the picture of this amazing bridge, God knows where. The twists and turns of not only the walking spaces but the overhead beams that support the curves spoke to me. So much like my life. Those mysterious pieces that support my "off the path" wanderings most often are comforts. As we have now celebrated the birth of Christ, I am feeling called to consider what I will take on this journey into 2018. I choose to package up my anxiety, release the hurts and forgive myself for my mistakes. When



I moved from West Virginia in the late 80s with two boys under 7 and two bags of clothes, I realized how little stuff I actually need and how important it was to take that first step. The journey end of the "bridge" or journey of my life has yet to appear. I set my goals one or two steps at a time. As I listen and am aware of God's presence, I feel directed, one step at a time. The key for me is to take those quiet moments to listen.

Prayer Practice: Take 20 minutes a day to quietly sit and think about what you "carry" on your journey. Let go of those things that are not essential so as to be ready for the mystery!

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The Next Chapter January 1, 2018

Choose life then, so that you and your descendants may live.
Deuteronomy 30:19

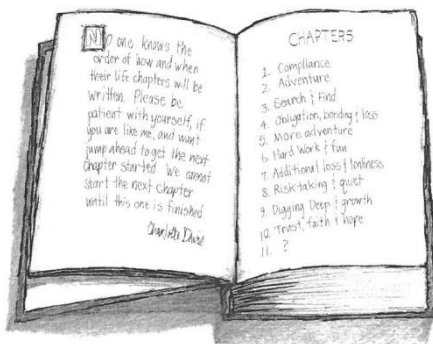
In a few days I will retire or rather, begin a new chapter in my lengthening life. Several uncertainties /questions still loom and organizing the necessary data - finances, health insurance, Medicare - is challenging. Throughout the Fall semester I, along with twenty other mature adults, have participated in The Next Chapter, a program designed for persons contemplating retirement within the coming year. What is unique to the program is the emphasis on "discerning your future in the Ignatian tradition" introducing the enrollees to Ignatian discernment and the practice of the daily Examen, a prayer practice of the awareness of God in the nitty-gritty moments of my daily life.

St. Ignatius of Loyola designed the practice to be short (10-15 minutes) and simple (5 steps):

1. Relish the moments of the day that have gone well.
2. Request the Spirit to lead me through my review of the day where I did not do well.
3. Review and recognize those faults.
4. Ask for forgiveness and healing.
5. Resolve in concrete ways to live tomorrow well.

Paraphrased from Reimagining the Ignatian Examen
Mark E. Thibodeaux, SJ

The Next Chapter program continues through the end of March. Join with our members in resolving, in concrete ways, to live tomorrow well.



Sr. Mary White, ascj
WVIS Board Member

January 2, 2018

“Whoever is not against us is for us.

Mark 9:40 (NRSV)

The mystery of the Incarnation is one of Divine Bridge-Building. The Emmanuel serves as both the Divine Bridge-Builder and the Divine Bridge to humanity, demonstrating for us a better way to relate to God and to one another. The central movement and message of the Gospel is that humankind is not and never was estranged from God, except in our conscious-ness. Historically, this has often exhibited itself through human systems of dehumanization, division, and separateness. Such systems are often fortified and galvanized through our religious, political, and social institutions and structures, which can powerfully and pervasively perpetuate these negative and destructive cycles.

An alternative Gospel vision for humanity seems so timely as our current culture is rife with malignant polarization, dichotomous systems, binary thinking, and incivility. As we stand at the cusp of a new year, we can decide whether we want to be part of the solution or part of the problem. Every beam or rivet in God’s Divine Bridge-Building we contribute through our intentional and positive actions and good will can go a long way toward bearing witness to the power, hope, and opportunity of God’s Divine Reign within and among us.

Prayer Practice: Pray for God’s blessing for one with whom you have significant disagreement.

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January 3, 2018

To those who received him, he gave them the power to become children of God. John 1:14

John 1:46- Come, see for yourself!

We know we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers.

1John 3: 43-52

Five years after I was ordained, I felt smothered by the gross clericalism in ministering. I felt that both the people and clergy saw me mainly as a role ‘father’ more than as a person ‘Bill’. I was expected to assume the places of honor. If I made a mistake, I was not held accountable. I had become a workaholic, empty and exhausted. I stepped out of priestly ministry for 18 months. I lived with a charismatic community who invited me to rest, accepted me as a person, and invited me to experience Jesus as a person more than as a doctrine/ministry.

During this period, Thomas Merton helped me to recover: “God seeks Himself in us and the aridity and sorrow of our heart is the sorrow of God who is not known to us – who cannot find Himself in us because we do not dare to believe or trust the incredible truth that He could live in us and live there out of choice, out of preference. But indeed we exist solely for this, to be the place he has chosen for His presence, his epiphany...For the love of our brother, our sister, our beloved, our wife, our child, that sees God in me, makes God credible to myself in me. Love is the epiphany of God in our poverty.- Hidden Ground of Love, 157

Christ, the Seer, seeing me search for meaning and purpose of my life and ministry, called me to choose him to be my center more than ministry. I began to see baptism, not ordination, as the source of my very life and ministry. God who loves me as a father/mother, brother/sister, servant/friend became more real for me through many people.

Prayer practice: What events and who have helped you to pass from death to life:

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January 4, 2018

Breath is the bridge which connects life to consciousness, which unites your body to your thoughts. Whenever your mind becomes scattered, use your breath as the means to take hold of your mind again. - Thich Nhat Hanh

It can be so easy to become overwhelmed by our experiences and our emotions. We can dwell in the past or worry about the future. Our bodies are in the present time yet our minds may not be. When this happens, we may say and do things we regret later. It causes discontent within ourselves and disrupts relationships with others.

I never really thought much about breathing – it just happens. When I was first introduced to the *Breath Prayer*, or *Jesus Prayer*, I had no idea the impact it would have on me. Simply focusing on my breath and a word or short phrase, was actually so calming and did bring me out of my thoughts into the present moment. Focusing on our breath can bridge that gap between past and present or between future and present.

There are over 100 occurrences of the word breath in Scripture. Often it is associated with the Holy Spirit, the breath of life. Jesus breathed on the disciples and said “receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). In Genesis 2:7, God breathed the breath of life to create human beings. Job said “the breath of the of the Almighty gives me life” (Job 33:4)

Building bridges with others begins with the bridge between our own mind and body– between what we think and what we do. Living in the present moment can be the greatest gift we give ourselves and those we encounter.

Prayer Practice

Jesus Prayer / Breath Prayer

Breathe in deeply, Breathe out deeply
Repeat 3 times

While breathing normally, focus on each breath
You may choose a word or simple phrase to go along
with your breath (e.g. Divine One, guide me)
When breathing in, silently say the first phrase
When breathing out silently say the second phrase
Continue the pattern 5 minutes or longer if you wish



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January 5, 2018

To those who accepted him, he gave them the power to become children of God. John 1:14

Christmas season helps me to appreciate and cherish the Giver of the gift of baptism: God birthing me into new life through acceptance of Jesus and the work he did. God who loves us creates us to be human persons, filled from the beginning with original blessings. We are tempted to choose another way that disorients and leads us away from the true self created in the image and likeness of God. God looks on us with love all the time. He recreates us through the faithfulness of Jesus to become his beloved daughters and sons, God's family with Jesus our Brother who once was dead and is now alive. He Pours his Spirit into us sacramentally and moment by moment for your breath is the gift and the breath of God in us.

Perhaps, as you read Thomas Merton's reflection on his own baptism, you might have a similar awareness of being found and being loved: "I entered into the everlasting movement of that gravitation which is the very life and spirit of God. God's own gravitation towards the depths of his own infinite nature, his goodness without end. And God, that center who is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere, FINDING ME, through incorporation with Christ, incorporated me into his immense and tremendous gravitational movement which is love, which is the Holy Spirit, LOVED ME, and he called out to me from his own immense depths." – Seven Storey Mountain, p274.

Prayer Practice: As you breathe, be grateful. Connect this with your breathing: You in me, I in you.

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January 6, 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 1 Corinthians 9:20-23: "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 by all means 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, doesn't that 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" (1 Corinthians 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" (1 Corinthians 15:3). Notice what the apostle is saying: that what he is going to share is the essence of the gospel (or good news)! What is the essence of the Gospel? The 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 – not a quote from a particular passage of the Old Testament, but a summary of the entire Old Testament! The essence of the gospel (part two) is: "that He was buried and that He was raised on the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:4). Again, this is not a quote from a particular passage of the Old Testament, but a summary of the entire Old Testament. I learned the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ: the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the whole Bible, and the Lord Jesus Christ was raised according to the whole Bible. I knew as a child that 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 surprising thing 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 that I never expected. I thought that I was going to be a bridge. They became a bridge to me. I am overwhelmed with gratitude.

Pastor Paul F. Bricker

January 7, 2018

“Building Bridges”

Often times in life we take on projects that require for us to build whether it be a life, faith, relationship, family, building, or even a bridge. Success of the project requires prayer, vision, cooperation, commitment, patience, resource, sacrifice and flat out hard work.



We live in a time where so many are out of touch with reality, a time where we are so easily seduced, a time where we are so easily led astray, a time where we buy into a fantasy, where we are talked out of the reality of life, and where we are invited in to deny the real place where we must live out our faith. We are so gullible to the spin doctor, the fake news, the false news, and alternative facts and what's really sad is that it is not illegal, it's not monitored, it can't be controlled, because there are no guidelines and there is no big brother to watch over it. We live in a time where we would rather build walls that separate instead of bridges that connect. We will put up a brick wall in New York minute: I am black and your white (brick wall). I am rich and your poor (brick wall). I am male and your female (brick wall). I am straight and you are gay (brick wall). I am Christian and your Muslim (brick wall).

Practice: The challenge becomes to tear down walls that separate and build bridges that connect. Instead of looking at what divides look for what unites. What are you building? Are you building walls that separate? Or bridges that connect?

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January 8, 2018

*“Thus says the Lord: Here is my servant whom I uphold,
my chosen one with whom I am pleased”*

Isaiah 42:1

Today in our Church we celebrate the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. We see in the Gospel reading the fulfillment of the prophecy spoken of in Isaiah, where our Lord, in obedience to His Father, humbles himself to be baptized. We are witness to His humility, the descent of the Spirit, and the voice of the loving Father, the Trinity in loving action before us.

This passage imprints in my heart the eternal union of the Trinity, ever-working and ever-loving, and the readings call me (and you) to come into union with them, in my thoughts and especially in my prayer time, to come to know them not as far-off beings, but as loving Father, Brother, and Advocate. In spending “quality time” with them, I can expect to grow and flourish like a bloom in the desert.

By knowing my God and my Savior, I may come to know His will, and if I am obedient to His will, I may come to hear my Father say: “My child, in you I am well-pleased.”

Prayer practice: Spend time this day reflecting on the Christmas season, the reason for His Incarnation, and see how we may do the Father’s will as Jesus our brother did in His time here on Earth, looking ahead toward the coming seasons of Lent and Easter.

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