

“Being A Builder Of Bridges”
Psalm 1
1 John 5:9-13
John 17:6-19

We have gathered the Seventh Sunday of Easter to remember and experience this truth: Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Jesus rose from the dead, accomplishing forgiveness, rebirth, and God’s saving power for humanity. Reconciliation between God and humanity was accomplished. The bridge of reconciliation was built between God and humanity. Loving God and loving others builds bridges to reconciliation. Regarding such bridges, Latasha Morrison, author of *Be the Bridge*, relates the following real-life example:

Before starting *Be the Bridge*, I’d worked in Austin for years and found myself increasingly unfulfilled in my ministry position. As I mentioned earlier, working at a predominately White church, I felt invisible, felt as though my identity as a Black woman was being muted. I wondered if I’d feel this dissatisfied and purposeless for the rest of my life I started praying. I started looking....I began to study the shape of my life, began considering how passionate I’d always been about race relations and saw that things weren’t getting better in the church...I thought about whether I might have a role to play in bringing restoration to broken systems, whether I might draw the church into the work of racial reconciliation....I started talking things through with friends, ten people of different ethnicities, some White friends, some Black, some Asian. And then I took a crazy step of faith: I invited them all to gather around a table and begin a dialogue about race.¹

Bridges to reconciliation can be built. Bridges to reconciliation are being built. Racial reconciliation begins one conversation at a time to gain understanding and appreciation for the other person’s story.

¹Adapted from Latasha Morrison, *Be The Bridge* (WaterBrook, 2019), 194-195.

Racial reconciliation occurs through building bridges. Jesus built the bridge for reconciliation through his birth, baptism, earthly obedience and suffering, teaching, healing, loving, death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. The bridge is best defined with Jesus' statement that he is the way, the truth, and the life. Moreover, the Greatest Commandment, The Sermon on the Mount and Matthew 25 encourage us to be bridge builders. In this regard, Latasha Morrison writes,

...the work of building bridges toward restorative racial reconciliation is firmly rooted in biblical principles. We acknowledge the truth of our racial history because, as Scripture says, the truth has the power to set us free. We lament injustice and push through the guilt and shame of our history of racial sin because only then can we recognize and truly grieve our sins.²

Racial sin, amongst all ethnicities, denies the biblical truth that all people are created in the image of God.

Psalm 1, 1 John 5:9-13 and John 17:6-19 delineate that loving God and loving others is the foundation and heart of living a life of reconciliation as a follower of Jesus.

Psalm 1 articulates that each person who is called by God must take their own place in the mission and ministry of the church by devoting themselves to God's ways not human ways. Psalm 1:1-2 reads "Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked... but their delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law they meditate day and night."

1 John 5:9-13 affirms that being able to testify to what God is doing in one's life is imperative for effectively participating in the mission and ministry of God. 1 John 5:9,11-12 reads, "If we receive human testimony, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that he has testified to his Son.... And this is the testimony: God

²Latasha Morrison, *Be The Bridge* (WaterBrook, 2019), 197.

gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

John 17:6-19 unequivocally states that the Father loves the world and sent the Son into the world to save the world not condemn it. And the church is sent into the world to do likewise; love, not condemn. Jesus says in John 17:6, 15-16, 18, “I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they kept your word.... I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one.... As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.” The Father sent the Son into the world. Jesus lived the way, the truth and the life. Jesus sent his disciples then, sends them now and will send them tomorrow into the world to remember, tell and live the way of Jesus. Jesus’ message is radical. It challenges humans in their ways. Religion, law and culture all challenge the way of Jesus. Jesus calls his followers to become holy, make all the world holy and to be so much like him that no one would see life anywhere but in him.³

The message of the Seventh Sunday of Easter is this: the church is the bridge construction company. Every Christian is a contractor. But here is the catch. Much of the world’s hostility toward Christians is due to the way we have participated in the mission and ministry of Jesus; lots of judgment not so much love. Again, Latasha Morrison writes,

We seek and extend forgiveness for the racial injustices we’ve perpetuated or

³In the four paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of David Gambrell, Christopher T. Holmes, Mark F. Sturgess, Lance B. Pape and Jason Byassee in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year B, Volume 2* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 302-303, 304-306, 306-307, 308-310 and 310-311.

suffered because we were forgiven by Christ himself. We repent and turn from our sin and do everything within our power to right the wrongs we've committed (or our ancestors have committed) because that's the evidence of lives changed by God.... We seek restorative reconciliation because we were restored and reconciled with God.... God didn't draw us through the process of reconciliation for our own sake. He reconciled us so we could bring reconciliation to others in his name. He loved us so we could love others in his name. He made us bridge builders so we could draw others into bridge building in his name.⁴

By believing in Jesus Christ and following his ways, we participate with God in God's mission and ministry of reconciliation.

Jesus' resurrection from the dead completed the bridge of reconciliation between God and humanity, which began at his birth. Loving God and loving others constructs bridges of reconciliation. Be humble. Be an empathetic historian. Be a reconciler and healer. Be for the oppressed. Be a righter of wrongs. Be a restorer of relationships. Be a builder of bridges. Amen.

*This sermon was preached (Livestream due to the Coronavirus) on Sunday, 16 May 2021
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⁴Latasha Morrison, *Be The Bridge*, 197.