

Oregon City United Methodist Church
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Series: Out Roaming

Sermon: The Bridge - Filling in the Gap

Hebrews 10:11-18

Every priest goes to work at the altar each day, offers the same old sacrifices year in, year out, and never makes a dent in the sin problem. As a priest, Christ made a single sacrifice for sins, and that was it! Then he sat down right beside God and waited for his enemies to cave in. It was a perfect sacrifice by a perfect person to perfect some very imperfect people. By that single offering, he did everything that needed to be done for everyone who takes part in the purifying process. The Holy Spirit confirms this:

This new plan I'm making with Israel
isn't going to be written on paper,
isn't going to be chiseled in stone;
This time "I'm writing out the plan in them,
carving it on the lining of their hearts."

He concludes,

I'll forever wipe the slate clean of their sins.

Once sins are taken care of for good, there's no longer any need to offer sacrifices for them.

Sermon

Almost 100 years ago, the 34 year old suspension bridge that hung between Oregon City and West Linn needed a revamp. Automobiles were now making their way down the brand new 99 Super Highway, as it was called and there needed to be a way to cross the river without heading all the way to Portland. The engineers used the suspension bridge to help hold up the new bridge as they built it. This Archway Bridge was made of steel. It's hard to tell, because it is covered by a special concrete named gunite. The concrete is purely decorative, it doesn't help hold up the structure, but they sprayed it on the steel because paper mills cough up sulphuric Dioxide out their smokestacks as a pollutant and this destroys steel. The concrete casing is used to protect the beams. Construction was made difficult by the engineering challenges posed by the great depth of the river at the site and worse from the need to manage and accommodate the frequent and ever increasing water traffic on its surface.

There were stairways and observation decks on the piers, believe it or not, there once were bathrooms, and observation balconies on the bridge, but due to vandalism, were sealed by concrete in 1937. If you walk across it, you can see where the stairs used to be.

The bridge was opened in December of 1922, the cost of construction was \$300,000. Or around 4.6 million today. Oregon City only had 5,000 people at the time. Currently, there are around 15,000 cars that daily go over the river via the Arch bridge - a far greater number than it's earlier years. Restrictions on large and heavy vehicles are in place now to protect it. The Trimet buses used to go over, but now take the Abernathy bridge.

In 2005, the Arch was added to the National Register of Historic Places. Many of you may remember it received a \$15 million dollar overhaul in 2010 that shut it down for almost 2 years. What does history have next

in store for the old bridge? It has been in the news recently. There are plans floating out there of turning the bridge into a cyclist and pedestrian bridge. Years of study are now underway.

For 132 years, the cities of West Linn and Oregon City have been connected by bridge over the chasm, and it looks to be that way into the future.

Why talk about all of this? Our sermon series is called “Out Roaming”, we went to a bakery, a salvage yard, and now today, a bridge. Sometimes I get the feeling that we forget how far we used to be separated from God, and because of that, we waver in our appreciation for Jesus or take him for granted. You have to know that the gap that separated us from God wasn’t a little trickle of sins or a tiny stream of errors. An ocean of sins separated us from God. No human being could bridge that gap. Not even an army of experts in spiritual engineering could build a bridge and get us close to God. For the holy God is just that – holy. He cannot and will not allow sin and sinful people to smudge his crystal pure presence. How did our scripture passage put it? The priest do their services, but cannot cannot bridge that great divide.

Yet, as holy and just and pure as God is, that’s how loving and merciful and kind he is. God our Savior wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. He demonstrated that love best when he sent his Son, Jesus, to be the Mediator, the Go-Between, the bridge-builder between himself and sinners. Jesus is a bridge between us and God.

Jesus was able to carry out this seemingly impossible task because he is both God and man. Jesus took on human flesh, placed himself under God’s demands, and did what we couldn’t. He lived perfectly. He could do that because he is also divine. God now pulls Jesus’ perfect life like a blanket over our dirty, sinful life. That’s an important part of Jesus’ bridge work. He did the whole work. Nothing was left out. There is nothing left to do to make that more real or more perfect. Remember what Jesus shouted from the cross. I am mindful of Jesus’ last words on the cross. “*It is finished!*” A long time ago, I just thought he meant that his life was done. It’s finished. But as I look at it now, I believe that he meant that the bridge is done. It is complete. The bridge between God and sinners is done, and because it is, we have approach and access to God in full confidence.

And we can say that Jesus’ work is whole in another sense. A bridge is no good if it only is half done. It is also no good if only some people can use it. Listen to the apostle. “*Christ Jesus gave himself as a ransom for all*”. For me, this is a most important truth of the Bible. Since Jesus’ work is whole and complete for all, that surely includes each one of us. The only way to miss out is to say, “I don’t need it or don’t want it.”

He is the bridge. Our go between between God and us. Anytime someone asks me what God is like, we have an answer. Look at his Son. The fruit didn’t fall far from the tree. You want to know who God is? Look at Jesus. He had the same ideas, the same love, the same compassion as God. And I know the story is true. In every other religion out there, the different god’s that people pray to and expect help from, it is an all powerful god. In a zeus like manner dispensing justice and blessings based on obedience. But the Christian God is different. Matter of fact, it doesn’t sound very God like at all. Our God sent his son to die for us on a cross. A humble man. A peaceful man. Showing us the true nature of God. He didn’t make us so that so he would have someone bow down and worship him. We’re not here to be his little minions. He made us so that we could be in relationship with him. We will be his People. He will be our God. And we know of God because of the bridge named Jesus. And we do worship him, freely, in thankfulness and gratitude of his love.

What’s my message today? If you want to cross the river, you gotta find a bridge. If you want to find God, look for the bridge that will take you there. For us, that’s Jesus. He is our bridge builder. And the family of God said, AMEN.

Opening:

Good morning Oregon City United Methodist Church. Welcome to Week 32 of our Online Series. Bridging the gap between preCovid and post Covid - although we do not know when all of this will end. We are on the Oregon City Arch Bridge, out roaming around for our sermon series this month. I've been told that daredevils have taken motorcycles up and over the arches, but that would scare me to death - I have no need to meet Jesus face to face today - but I do want to worship and praise him today, and I hope you do to. Here are our announcements this morning!

Closing.

To modern ears, benedictions may sound like archaic and rigid conclusions to worship services. Why not just say, "You're dismissed"? Get up and leave?

Benedictions are gospel blessings that teach us to expect what only God can give, and the Bible is filled with them. God's first word to humanity was to bless them (Gen. 1:28). He commanded Israel's priests to place his blessing over his people (Num. 6:22-27). As Jesus's final act before ascending to heaven, he lifted his hands and blessed his disciples (Luke 24:51). Most of the New Testament letters include at least one benediction. These last words of a service do not conclude the worship, but transition it out of the building. They're like bridges, carrying the hopeful content of the letter into our everyday lives. Much like today's Benediction, the very last words of the Bible: "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all. Amen" Cross the bridge in peace!

Offertory:

One way to bridge the gap between listening and doing is by your offering. We know what is important to us by where we put our money. If I love Capital One more than my kids, what does that say? If I love the lottery more than the gift I give my wife for her birthday, what does that say? One bridge between knowing God and loving God is by showing it with your generosity. Says it in Deuteronomy 15: No one should appear before the LORD empty-handed: Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you. Ouch. I'm not into guilt, but it shows the importance of our gifts. May cross the bridge from being listeners of the Word, to Doers of the Word, by participating in the offering today.

Children's Time:

Once upon a time, there were two brothers. Their father had a large farm and when he became too old to work, he called his sons to him. "I am too old to work anymore," he said. "I will divide my farm in half and give each of you one half. I know that you will always work together and will be good friends."

When the brothers first started farming on their 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 day, one of the brothers was at his house when a carpenter came to his door and said, "I would like to do some work. Do you have any work that I can do?" The brother thought for a moment and then replied, "I would like for you to build a fence on my property. Build it down near the stream there that separates my farm from my brother's. I don't want to see my brother any more and I would like for you to build a high fence there please. 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. Instead of building a high fence there, he had built a bridge over the stream. The man walked down to take a look at the bridge, and as he did, 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.

The brother then walked back up to his farmhouse to talk to the carpenter. "Can you stay?" he asked. "I have more work for you to do." The carpenter answered, "I'm sorry but I can't stay. I have to go, for I have many other bridges to build."

Sometimes you and I have a disagreement with our brothers and sisters in Christ. When that happens, we often build a fence between ourselves and them. We stop talking to them. We don't want to see them. We don't want to be around them. That isn't what Jesus wants us to do. Instead of fences, he wants us to build a bridge of love between us.

"If a fellow believer hurts you, go and tell him—work it out between the two of you. If he listens, you've made a friend." Matthew 18:15 (The Message) Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. Romans 13:10 (NLT)

We all have the wood and the tools. Do you want to build a fence, or a bridge?

Pastoral Prayer:
Father,

We come to you this morning as a people saddened by the violence and conflict we witness on the streets of our country.

We know from your Word that you created all of us in your image; that you are a God who shows no partiality; that by your Son, Jesus, you have ransomed a people unto yourself from every tribe, language, people, and nation on the earth. We know that racism, bigotry, and hatred are absolutely antithetical to the gospel of Jesus Christ and represent the work of the evil one.

In times like this, we are tempted to give up hope, to despair, to believe that the grieving will not end. But you tell us, Father, that we do not grieve as those who have no hope. We have hope because we serve the God who is greater than the darkness. We serve the God of hope.

So this morning we pray for peace -- not a false peace that comes from sweeping our nation's problems under the rug or dismissing them as water under the bridge, but a lasting peace rooted in our trust in your sovereignty and your provision.

Help us to build the bridge between the lost and found. Help us to build the bridge between the lonely and the community. Help us to build a bridge between unfairness and justice. Help us to build a bridge between you and us, that we might open our eyes and see the love that is already present.

It is in his name we pray, the bridge builder between God and Man, who taught us this prayer...