

SERMON – 12/4/26
'Bridging the Gap'

Acts 2:22-41

"All the people of Israel, then, are to know for sure that this Jesus, whom you crucified, is the one that God has made Lord and Messiah! " (Acts 2:36)

It's hard to believe that it is eight and a half years since the Queensferry Crossing opened to traffic. I'm sure most of you will remember watching it gradually take shape as the months and years wore on, from the activity in the middle of the Forth sinking the marine foundations and then raising the towers to the creation of the approach roads and the carriageways. Of course some of you will remember the building of the previous Road Bridge, now more that 60 years ago, and although there are no longer any eye-witnesses of the construction of the railway bridge in the 1880s, the same challenges faced the designers and the builders of each bridge as they attempted to get from one side of the estuary to the other. How were they going to bridge the gap?

This week we have all marvelled as we have seen how human ingenuity can send a tiny capsule on a 700,000 mile journey but however amazing it must have been to gaze upon the far side of the moon and however much has been advanced in scientific knowledge, the gap between the earth and the moon undoubtedly remains as great as ever.

As diplomats and peacemakers seek to bridge the gap between the United States and Iran and between Israel and Lebanon and Palestine and between Russia and Ukraine where are they to start, what are they to aim for and how are they going to accomplish their task? And as we seek to fulfil the Great Commission that Jesus has given us, to make disciples of all people, how is the stubborn gap going to be bridged between human beings with all our well-intentioned longings and a God whose arms are extended in generous welcome?

We read this morning what was, in fact, one of the first Christian sermons, preached on the day that the Holy Spirit had come upon the first disciples, and if this is the first recorded example of

Christian preaching it makes me want to ask what it has to teach me as a Christian preacher today and what it has to teach all of us about the communication of the Gospel message with those around us.

All in all, our mission, whether as preachers in the pulpit or as ordinary Christians in our day to day dealings with others, is to make a bridge between the Bible and the world in which we live that bridges may be built between people and God and between one person and another, one group and another, one nation and another. Unfortunately, many of the bridges that are built never quite reach one side or the other – some sermons, and the witness of some individuals have scarce a mention of what God has said in His Word; and some preachers are so out of touch with reality, and the lives of some Christians are so disconnected from the world around them that the gap remains unbridged and the Good News remains unheard.

The genius of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, however, is in the way it plugs in to where the crowd are at, catching their attention, and then taking them to the very heart of the matter, to focus upon Jesus Christ, before bringing them back to where they are so that they can go forward profoundly changed by what they have heard.

Now, I don't find myself doing this very often, but this morning let me give you three headings for this sermon, each one beginning with the same letter. First, I'd like to speak about the **context** of Peter's sermon, then the **content**, and finally the **consequences** of his preaching.

So first of all, then, the **context** of the sermon. The crowd that Peter was addressing had all been witnesses of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples 50 days after Easter – there were those among their number who were amazed by what they had seen and wanted to know what it all might mean, and there were those who were making fun of the Christians and who had decided that they were just a bunch of people who had been drinking too much and were making fools of themselves. But everyone who was there and all who were subsequently listening to Peter's sermon had witnessed the coming of the Spirit and

whether they knew what was going on, or whether they understood what had happened, or whether they believed this was the work of God or not, they had all been there and *that* was the opportunity that Peter took as the opening to preach the Gospel, the first pillar of the bridge, as it were. He begins his sermon where his listeners were at.

So where are we at here this morning? What is the context into which *this* sermon is being preached? Well, which of us this week will not have been awestricken by the reports of the Artemis II voyage to the moon and back and which of us, even this morning, will not have been deeply fearful of the global consequences of what is unfolding around the Persian Gulf? In the midst of that there is the context of the beginning of a new ministry in our united congregation and in the shaping of our priorities as a church, and of course the individual circumstances that each one of us are caught up in. There is our **context** and there is where this sermon must be anchored. But where next?

The **content** of Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost is disarmingly simple – he proclaims Christ to them as the One through whom the Holy Spirit has been poured out in their sight. He recalls the life of Jesus, and particularly the miracles and wonders that He had done in Israel which had caused many people to acknowledge during His lifetime that He was from God. He narrates the story of Jesus' death, pointing out that while it was by God's design and foreknowledge, both the Jews who handed Him over to be crucified and the Romans who actually carried out the execution were guilty of His blood. And he announces the resurrection, showing how it had been prophesied many hundreds of years before, and proclaiming that it is this exalted Jesus who has poured out His Spirit on the disciples. In other words, the *content* of Peter's sermon is Jesus Himself, and *He* should be the content of *all* our Christian proclamation in one way or another. Writing to the Colossians some years later, the apostle Paul says simply: 'We proclaim *Him*.'

Thinking back to what we said about where people are today and what we are looking for in a sermon, I'd like to suggest that preaching Christ is always relevant. If you are looking for reassurance and encouragement in a world of uncertainty, a word

of comfort may suffice for the moment but it is only in Christ Himself that we will find true and lasting assurance. If you are looking for help to live a better life, then you may find help for the moment through what the preacher or the Christian friend says but if through their witness you are introduced to Christ Himself, then you will discover through the forgiveness of your sins and the enabling of the Holy Spirit a whole new dimension to life. If you are seeking light to open up the mysteries of the Word of God, Christ is the key, for He is the Word made flesh. Christ Himself is the bridge between God and the world we live in, for He dwelt among us, He shared our humanity and He opened up a living way into the presence of God through His death and resurrection. Or to use Peter's words, the words of our text this morning: "Know for sure that this Jesus, whom you crucified, is the one that God has made Lord and Messiah." The content of our preaching must be Christ Himself for the Lord Jesus is the bridge that spans the gap.

But finally, what happens when the bridge makes landfall at the other side? What **consequences** do we see when the message of the Gospel really touches down in the context we find ourselves in? On the day of Pentecost, the crowd were "deeply troubled" and they asked the apostles what they could do. Peter told them how their sins might be forgiven, if they admitted their mistakes and took hold of Christ, and how they would receive God's gift of His Spirit to take up residence within them, and we are told that about 3000 people became Christians that day. Well, that is one effective sermon!

Sometimes the preaching of God's Word makes people feel very uncomfortable indeed; sometimes folk are left with more questions in their minds at the end of a conversation they have had about faith than they had at the beginning – they have been stirred up, and perhaps you have been stirred up today.

The bridges over the Forth remain a marvel of engineering. Although they have stood the test of time they have had to be adapted along the way, just as Queen Margaret's establishment of a ferry so long ago was an advance on the various ways of getting across that had gone before. The image of a bridge illustrates very well the connexion that is made when a person

takes hold of Christ. The Latin word for a priest – *pontifex* – literally means a bridge-builder. Christ is our high priest who opens the way to God for us bridging a gap that we cannot cross by our own efforts. And the Bible calls the whole people of God a royal priesthood, for it is the task of each one of us as individuals and as a church to build bridges between God and those around us.

We gather here this morning to celebrate our Easter faith and to consider how to live that out as members of a united congregation in a time of social upheaval and deep uncertainty about the future. That is our **context** today. We have heard God's Word to us – “Know for sure that this Jesus, whom you crucified, is the one that God has made Lord and Messiah” - and perhaps we have been made to think again about *our* connexion with this Jesus, our share in the responsibility for His crucifixion (for He died for the sin of the whole world), about the Good News that through Christ's death and resurrection there is offered to all forgiveness of sins and new life, fulness of life, eternal life and the enabling gift of the Holy Spirit. That is the **content** of the message today – it is always basically the same (although we need constantly to be finding new ways to express it). But what will the **consequences** be? They must start with each one of us. Will we go from here unchanged, the bridge God is building still not reaching the other side? Or will we reach out to the Christ who is reaching out to us today and in repentance for our waywardness and disobedience, and with faith that in Christ we may be reconciled to the Father, will we enter into life today? For when we do that's when the whole world begins to be transformed.