

JOHN 14:15-21
BRIDGE BUILDING

Building bridges is fraught with difficulty; just ask those charged with building the new Queensferry Crossing, the new Forth Bridge. It was supposed to open in December, but bad weather delayed it and then it was supposed to open this month; now it will open in July or August. When it is finished, it will connect us with Fife and the North and will make life easier crossing the Forth. That's the plan. I love this picture of a bridge: it is one of the most photographed bridges in Scotland. This is the Belhaven Bridge at Dunbar when the tide has come in; it looks for all the world a bridge that is going nowhere because it is surrounded by water; when the tide is out it actually does go somewhere; it crosses a small stream to allow you onto Belhaven beach, but when tide is in this is what it looks like, a bridge surrounded by water and going nowhere; it is even called "the bridge to nowhere". Building bridges is fraught with difficulty and even danger; lots of people have been killed in the building of bridges across the world, even on this latest!

Bridges cross gaps and make connections. Before there was a bridge across the Forth of any kind at Queensferry, you had to go to Stirling to find the next place to cross the river and connect with the other side. Or, there was a ferry to cross the river. Until 1964, if you wanted to cross the Forth in your car, you had to queue at Queensferry for the ferry to take you to other side and that was the connection. The bridge makes that connection so much easier, most of time. Bridges cross gaps and make connections. I want you to keep that idea in your mind this morning as we look at Jesus' words in John 14 about the gift of the Spirit and the ways in which the Spirit has gone to work in the church and in the world since He came. God is building bridges; the church is building bridges for the gospel; we are building bridges in mission.

It starts with a promise: "*I will...*" (John 14:16f) God will send His Spirit and the Spirit will live in the disciples of Jesus. The promise is made again later: "*the Counsellor...*" (John 14:26) This promise was made at the same time as the promise we looked at last week, of a place in the Father's house, the ultimate safe space that we call heaven. We said last week, that these promises were made to Jesus' disciples just after Jesus had spoken about His going away; He was leaving them. It was an unmitigated disaster for the disciples to think of Jesus going away; even worse when that meant He would die; even worse when He said that some would betray and disown him. "What next?" is the question in their minds and here Jesus tells them what is next. He will send His Spirit and the Spirit will make all sorts of connections and build bridges.

The first thing the Spirit will do is to connect Jesus with His disciples. "*I will...*" (John 14:16) "Another Counsellor" – the Spirit's job is to continue the work Jesus has begun; that's what "another" suggests. Jesus is the first, then the Spirit comes after Him to carry on the work He has begun. The Spirit also continues the presence of Jesus, He is the "presence of Jesus when Jesus is absent." (Brown) The work that Jesus began, the Spirit will continue; the person Jesus was will continue with the disciples by the presence of the Spirit. The Spirit's job is to connect us to Jesus, so that the presence of Jesus is still with us and the work of Jesus still goes on in our lives. The Spirit was given to the disciples on the day of Pentecost and has stayed with the church ever since, bringing the presence of Jesus to us and making Jesus alive in our hearts every day.

There are other ways in which Jesus talks about these connections: "*I will...*" (John 14:18) "*Because I...*" (John 14:19) When the Spirit comes, Jesus comes! The Spirit brings the power and grace of Jesus to us when we are in need. He walks alongside us to help us, guide us, support us, teach us, pray for us and lots more besides. When we look to Jesus for anything, for grace, hope, peace, forgiveness, for that new kind of life, then it is the Spirit who brings it to us. They are so closely connected as to be almost inseparable. The Spirit continues to do

what Jesus has begun; His job is to make us think more highly of Jesus so that we trust Jesus more. He builds a bridge between Jesus and us, He is the bridge between Jesus and us.

Let me give you an example: Peter tells us this: “*Christ died...*” (1 Peter 3:18) That’s the great theory of the gospel, the good news for the world; that’s what Jesus did for us. He died to bring us to God; that’s the truth at the heart of the gospel; preachers tell the world that Jesus died to bring us to God and we can tell you that as part of our statement of faith as a church. It is generally true. The Spirit’s job is to make that come alive in our hearts. It is no longer true just for the “world” but now it is true for “me”; the Spirit connects me to Christ so that what Jesus did for the world, now I know He did for me; He connects me in a personal way to Jesus, and not just me, but each one of us. The Spirit connects us to Jesus so that no longer is He just a historical figure, but He is “my Saviour and my Lord”, who lives in my heart. The Spirit connects us with Jesus in a way we never connected before.

The Spirit also works as the church builds bridges. He inspires the church to want to build bridges in the first place. Why would we want to make ourselves uncomfortable and put what we have at risk by building bridges with the messy world out there? Would it not be easier and safer just to build a wall and keep ourselves safe inside and everyone else safely outside? The Spirit inspires us to want to be like Jesus. Jesus reached out to people in need, some who were lost, others who were weak and vulnerable. The Spirit inspires us to want to be like Jesus, to reach out to people in our world who are lost, weak and vulnerable and show them the same love from Jesus as we have received. The Spirit inspires us to be a mission-shaped church, to want to build bridges with the community, to want the church to be part of the community in which we live and to bring kingdom-values to bear on our community.

Again, let me give you an example. Paul is in Athens, the capital of ancient Greece, just as today. He goes for a walk around the city and the biggest impression is made by all these “gods”; he sees an altar to “an unknown God” and that makes an even bigger impression. He is given the opportunity to speak to the community leaders, the opinion formers, the movers and shakers and says to them “*what you...*” (Acts 17:23) He tells them about Jesus and the resurrection and some believe and become disciples; others just laugh. Here is the Spirit at work in Paul and through him, inspiring Paul to see the “unknown God” and through that, connecting with these men of Athens, so that they will understand the gospel; the Spirit at work connecting these men with the gospel and with Jesus so that some will come to faith.

In our mission bridge-building, there are certain things we can do; there are certain things only the Spirit can do. I believe it was the Spirit who inspired us to start Messy Church and begin to make connections with families in a new way. We have met people through Messy Church that we would never have met otherwise and some have connected with Jesus and the gospel and the church in a way that they never would otherwise. The Spirit helps us choose and decide which opportunities will be best for us to follow and each part of our mission connects us with people in different ways. The Guild connects with one group of people; the Soup and Roll lunch connects us with a different group of people, some we would not connect with otherwise! We make these opportunities and we tell people what we believe about Jesus; it is the Spirit who changes people’s hearts; it is the Spirit who makes connections with Jesus and persuades people to believe. We can’t do that; only the Spirit can inspire and persuade people to change way they think.

The Spirit connects us with the right way to live. We can’t bridge-build in mission without being the right kind of people. The Spirit inspires us to want to live our lives in Jesus’ ways and then He does two more things: He guides us in right ways and He makes us able to be the right kind of people. Why should I want to love my neighbour? My default position as a human being is to be concerned only about myself! The Spirit inspires us to love others, to care for people in need, to forgive those who wrong us, to want to be like Jesus. Then it is in the power of the Spirit that we are actually able to love our neighbour and do good to those who hurt us. The

Spirit connects us with the values that Jesus teaches, with the values of His kingdom and helps us connect these values with our lives; He builds a bridge between the life we see in Jesus and hear from Jesus on the one hand and the kind of people we are on the other.

Our job – to keep in step with the Spirit. How do we do that? Well, we ask ourselves ‘what does Jesus want?’ What kind of person does Jesus want me to be? What kind of Church does Jesus want us to be? What kind of mission does Jesus call us to undertake with Him? What kind of life does Jesus want us to live? These are questions for our prayers; questions for our Bible reading; questions for our time in worship. When we begin to ask these questions of ourselves and of the church, the Spirit is at work in us, building a bridge between Jesus and us, being the bridge between Jesus and us. Our love for Jesus will be deeper, our faith will be stronger, our desire to serve will be keener; we will be more and more the people that Jesus wants us to be. He is the bridge to life, Jesus with us.