

“Building Bridges”

Mark 10:35-45

Pr Julio Romero

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 anymore and I would like 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 so, 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.”

Author unknown

The disciples of our Lord Jesus were more than just students, they were brothers, they were a family. And as in the story I just told you, it was not rare that there were disagreements and arguments among them, just as it happens from time to time in most families.

Sometimes those arguments and disagreements are between spouses, other times between parents and children, among siblings, extended family and the list goes on and on.

The Gospel for this morning tells us about the conflict between John and James and the rest of their brothers, as I call them because when we put Jesus as the center of our life together, that's what we are, that's what we become, brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus.

It seems that John and James forgot about that the day they went to Jesus and asked him to let them sit one at his right and one at his left when the Lord Jesus sits on his throne of glory.

It is clear that John and James had their own agenda, some self-interest as disciples of Jesus and as part of the family of disciples that our Lord Jesus had chosen.

The Gospel tells us that once the other ten disciples heard about John and James' intentions, they were angry, they were furious.

I wonder how intense the argument was, I have never seen an angry person smile or say kind words to those who offended them or hurt them. Certainly, it was not a moment to enjoy or be proud of. John and James had broken and betrayed their trust, their brotherhood, it was so bad that the Lord Jesus had to intervene and bring peace and reconciliation among them.

We don't know if once the Lord intervened, there were apologies from James and John, we don't know if they shook hands and embraced each other. We don't know that, what we know is that that incident was not the end of John and James as disciples of Jesus. There was reconciliation, the brotherhood among them was restored, they were able to forgive, reconcile, build a bridge and follow Jesus as brothers.

What this story teaches us is that personal agendas, self-interests and ambitions, trying to be ahead of the other, outsmart the other, don't have a place in a family circle or anywhere else and especially among brothers and sisters in Christ. It also teaches us that forgiveness, reconciliation and repentance are the ways to build bridges and restore brotherhood among people.

The third teaching element in this story is "Humility". James and John were confused about how things work in God's Kingdom. For them, to sit at the right hand and left hand of Jesus was the coolest, and most prestigious honour, something to feel very proud of. Little did they know that in God's Kingdom things are upside down, to be great is to be less than the others, to be first is to be last.

Jesus said to his disciples, *"Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant,"*⁴⁴ *and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.*⁴⁵ *For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."*

The world hasn't known any human being greater than Jesus, and what was it that he did? He washed others' feet, took care of the sick, the hopeless, the ones who mourned and ultimately died on the cross to save us all. God in human flesh could not lower himself any further than the cross to serve us. That's humility, and that is the way all the followers of Christ should be known, because only a humble person will know how to forgive, how to reconcile and how to build a bridge from the head to the heart to bring peace to this world.

Most of us are not carpenters, most of us would struggle using a hammer or a saw, let alone build a bridge, but we all can forgive, we all can make peace, reconcile and build spiritual bridges to embrace those who have offended us. May the Spirit of God give us the humility to serve and to work for the one who is the greatest and above everything, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.