

Get on with it!

Song of Solomon 2:8-13; James 1:17-27

September 4th 1964, I was two years old, dressed in a kilt, and hurried into a car by my grandmother and my two maiden great-aunts. We got to a special vantage point by the River Forth and joined a crowd. It being Scotland, where the weather never fails to tantalise, there was a Haar over the water, but the sunshine was behind it. It was a magical moment, and sure enough the mist began to lift.

“Look at the lady in blue, look at the lady in blue”, I remember my grandmother and great aunts saying as I fidgeted. Then the sun burned through the Haar and the beauty of the two elegant towers with their draped cables emerged.

It was quite something to be at the opening of the Forth Road Bridge fifty-four years ago. A year ago tomorrow, having driven down from Balmoral with a packed breakfast prepared by royalty (I thought I'd better get my name-dropping in early), I stood in the middle of a motor way on the southern bank of the River Forth.

It was quite something to be there 53 years later with the same lady in blue, though I was no longer in a kilt choosing something altogether more slimming in black.

Bridges, great or small, contemporary or ancient, are about connecting. Bridges overcome barriers. Bridges bring people together. Bridges honour the land by forging links of steel and stone and wood that allow us to communicate and share. Bridges span divides, rooted in the earth, but reaching out and up to the sky before coming down again.

The new Queensferry Crossing is a thing of great beauty, but it also speaks of things beyond steel and stone and wood. The Queensferry Crossing tells its own story as it reaches upward and downward, and across.

It is on the ancient site of pilgrimage, as people once travelled to the north visiting shrines at Dunfermline Abbey, and then on to St Andrews from the time of St Margaret onwards.

The image of the bridge speaks of the dynamic of Christian faith, which is about movement and purpose and service. Bridges have distinctive functions, and so does our Christian faith. Bridges connect places and peoples; so does our Christian faith. Bridges enable us to get on with it – our faith, our work, our lives.

James in his letter gives us powerful pointers to understanding what our Christian faith is about. At the heart of what James writes is that sparkling, worthwhile, real Christianity is about making a difference for good. We have to be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.

Above all else we are not simply to hear the Word of God, we are to do it. “Be doers of the word, not merely hearers...” We have to listen, we have to take it in, we have to mull it over in our minds; we have to think about it. But then we have to get on with it and do it.

If we are to be bridges of possibility enabling people to overcome the chasms of darkness, fear, loneliness, persecution and prejudice, then we have to be authentic in the way in which we live our faith out loud.

Be genuine in your love. Hate what is evil. Do the good thing. Love one another. Be honourable. Get on with making a difference. Be hopeful. Work through the painful times. Be hospitable to strangers. Let emotions be unashamed – there’s room for rejoicing and happiness; there’s room for tears and sadness. Get on with it as best you can with the people around you. Show them Jesus in your hands and heart.

Be honest about your abilities, neither falsely proud nor too self-effacing. Be someone who strives to keep the peace. Do the decent thing, even towards those you don’t like. Your actions of graciousness say more about you than they do about them. Do not sink to the level of people who are petty, self-obsessed, manipulative, and narrow-minded. Be bigger, reach out, help where you can, make a difference for good. But for goodness sake, get on with it, your faith, and put it into practice.

Returning to Morningside and beginning to get a sense of what has been happening in the last 18 months, I wonder about the bridges we need to build between each other, and across our community. I wonder what kind of connections we need to make with individuals, and with

groups. I wonder how we, from this magnificent building, which is filled with opportunities, will use it as a means to reach out to the people around us.

Some will be intrigued and interested by who we are and what we do. Some will be indifferent, not sure what our relevance is to them or to their world. Some might even be hostile to what we represent. Each person represents opportunities for us to reach out. If our Church is going to make the most of the gifts the 'Father of lights' has given to us, we are going to have to think again about how we build bridges outwards.

We need to be realistic. There won't be many people out there wondering Who Jesus us, but they might be intrigued by what those of us who think of ourselves as followers of Jesus do in His Name.

They might wonder about why we care about young people in our community, or the isolated, or the frail elderly, or the hurt souls, or the people not sure about their future and needing sanctuary in one of the few spaces in our community where there can be stillness. They might wonder why we think it is important to show hospitality to strangers, or connect with charities that have an impact across the world, or support charities nearer to home that deal with difficult situations.

Earlier we remade promises to God, revisiting that special relationship that gives some grist to what we believe and how we believe. These are not mere words; these are part of ourselves that we have given, again, to God. What we do with those promises matters.

When we build bridges with our faith, we find ways to address the pressure points where people are struggling to live: in times of loneliness, or frailty, or ill-health, or bereavement, or anger, or bewilderment. We won't be able to fix every situation, but we might be able to do something, in a small way or a big way, to make things bearable. Different strands linking together a bridge of kindness and faith, reaching out, connecting, including, and helping others on the road of life.

In a world where people are isolated, we don't build walls, we build bridges; we don't shut out, we welcome in. We tell our stories, and we listen to what others have to tell us.

Last week I met with our Communications Committee. I heard about the plans for the event later this month where we will be out on Morningside Road distributing information about our Church. I heard about plans for Christmas this year (yes, I know), and even Easter next year. As I listened, all I could hear was Christian people, getting on with it, building bridges, making connections, offering welcome, being intentional about invitation. That is what we are about, as followers of Jesus. People who are not simply spectators, but also participants.

Christians have been getting on with it, living their faith out loud, for two millennia. The first Christians in Jerusalem saw to the poor and needy of their community, sharing what they had to help where help was needed most. John Calvin, the French Reformer living in Geneva, responded to the needs of refugees, widows and orphans in the C16th, establishing a General Hospital and setting up the office of deacon and deaconess to supervise practical care and works of mercy, so that Christians in the city could be 'doers of the pure religion.'

If you want to be a Christian who gets on with it, be part of a bridge reaching with others and to others. If you are wondering about faith, listen out for events coming up where you will be able to explore actively what you believe, as well as what you might doubt. If you are still a wondering spectator, become a participant. There are many ways to volunteer inside and outside the Church where help is needed and faith can be lived out loud.

Reach up to God, reach out to neighbours. But please, in Jesus' Name, get on with it!

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen