

Jeremiah 28:5-9
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“Bridge Escorts”

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The Chesapeake Bay Bridge is a major dual-span bridge connecting Maryland’s rural Eastern Shore with the urban Western Shore. The original span opened in 1952 at a length of 4.3 miles and was the world's longest continuous over-water steel structure.

When the Chesapeake Bay Bridge opened it was so scary to drive across the bridge; people making the journey would become frightened and stop in the middle of their lane, frozen with fear. This would tie up traffic and cause other problems for people needing to get to the other side. In response, the idea of bridge escorts was developed. Bridge Escorts were people with experience and training who would drive your car over the bridge, with you in it, and then return the driving duties to you.

Today in the book of the Prophet Jeremiah, we see him and another Prophet named Hananiah with radically different visions for how the people of God, exiled by the Babylonian King, should proceed as they ponder the path to liberation. Hananiah believed God had broken the yoke of the Babylonian King and everyone and everything in exile would be returning to Jerusalem within 2 years. Jeremiah, while wishing Hananiah was right, appears before the people wearing a yoke, symbolizing how God had given him the news that the people would be required to submit to Babylon for up to 3 more generations.

We face these bridge crossings in life. In our life, our families, our church and nation. We face moments when we have to determine a path to follow. We hear differing forecasts of which path we should take and where it will lead. Some of the forecasts sound easy, others much more difficult.

In the debate between Hananiah and Jeremiah, who is right? Well, Jeremiah closes these verses reminding us a true prophet can only be determined by hindsight. Unfortunately, hindsight is exactly what we don’t have in these decisive moments. The debate between Hananiah and Jeremiah is symbolically reinforced by the geography. Later, we learn the crowd listening to them are literally standing on the edge of a cliff, as they ponder the path to liberation and new life.

What do we have in these moments. We have prayer. We have education. We have resources. We have each other and God. We have what the church calls discernment as we ask, What is God requiring of us in this situation? The discernment question may include questions like how much money can we save, or how many people can we attract or, who is this decision going to offend? But those are not the primary questions. The primary question is a question of God, What is God calling us to do?

Life sometimes stands us on a cliff, has us peering across a great divide, pondering how to cross to the other side where wholeness and peace await, this is the experience we have in

common with those ancient people listening to these two prophets. On the cliff we wonder not only how are we going to get over there, but what lessons God may want us to learn, what growth God may be inviting us to experience.

On the cliff, we experience moments of fear, confusion, and anguish. That, for people of God, is the beginning of awakening. On that cliff God is preparing us to experience new life, a resurgence of Spirit, a transformation, a resurrection.

Hananiah's mistake is he assumed covenant faithfulness to God was an insurance policy that kicks in every time we need deliverance from hardship. But it isn't! Faithfulness to God is rooted in an ongoing, living relationship. The awakenings which come as we begin to cross the bridge; require the difficult spiritual work of letting somethings go, letting other things be as they are, and letting new things arrive and take shape in our life.

The image of a Bridge remains a prominent image for ministry in the modern world. A bridge serves to connect us to another person, another place, another time, another culture, another story, connecting us to God's Word and work in the world. It is out of deep faith in God's unconditional love that I believe the work of building bridges shapes our ministry as Christians... Becoming a bridge builder includes; helping people meet basic needs and gain their integrity, speaking out against all kinds of injustice and favoritism, and working for peace around the world, and in the everyday places where we live.

I used to have a poster which said, "The most faithful thing a Christian can do is live boldly and compassionately, without fear." In a society often driven by fear, this is part of the awakening that lies in store. Fear to courage is the bridge we are being called to cross. And yes, there are bridge escorts we have around us. The primary one being Jesus Christ himself, as well as each other.

We are those bound to Christ Jesus; who by the grace of God crossed the bridge from death to life... and thereby gained everything. We are uniquely gifted by God to cross the bridge hand and hand, led by God, and to experience the glorious awakenings God has in store.

Amen