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St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Warsaw
Sunday of the Resurrection: Easter Day
April 17, 2022

Lectionary Year C: Luke 24:1-12

A couple of miles east of Drayton, North Dakota, where I was born, stood a bridge dating back to the mid-Fifties. It was a typical bridge of its era, known as a Parker truss bridge in the engineering world. Its construction was hastened by the increasingly inadequate older bridge, built in 1911, that crossed the Red River immediately east of downtown Drayton. The 1911 bridge had a lift span that could be raised to allow riverboats to pass through. Alas, the riverboat era came to a close shortly after that bridge was built, and the lift span was raised only once in the four decades that it spanned the Red.

Two large pulleys -- larger than wagon wheels -- around which the lift cables stretched still mark the entrance to Schumacher Park in Drayton. It won't be much longer 'til no one knows what they were even used for.

Fortunately, during my brief formative years in Drayton, I was surrounded by people who were well-versed in the history of the community. One of those people was my babysitter, Ted Jorde, former Drayton chief of police. He used to take me to the park and explain to me what those larger-than-a-wagon-wheel things were used for.

I wasn't fortunate enough to ever cross the old lift bridge, as it

was dismantled in 1955 -- a full eighteen years before I was born. But I did enjoy many trips with Ted Jorde across the "new" bridge, which stood at the crossing of the Red just west of the ghost village of Robbin.

Progress dealt a blow to the Parker truss bridge of my childhood on February 22, 2011, when it was imploded following the construction of the current bridge, which was designed to keep traffic flowing across the Red during the worst of spring floods. I will still quickly point out, though, that the "old" bridge never went under even at the crest of the disastrous Flood of 1997. The bridge wasn't the problem; rather, the western approach on North Dakota Highway 66 was too low.

The day the new bridge opened, I made a rogue crossing over that Parker truss bridge one last time, weaving around the barricades intending to keep people off it. And I remembered all the afternoons many years ago when I would cross the Red with the omnipresent Ted Jorde at the wheel of his 1965 Chevrolet Impala.

As for Parker truss bridges themselves, they're a dying breed; I cannot, for example, think of any survivors around here. I'll let you know when I find one!

Those of us who still travel with AM radios in our cars know one of the characteristics of a Parker truss bridge. There's enough steel in the span to block the signal from even the strongest AM station, so when you pass through, all you hear is the "zzt-zzt-zzt-zzt-zzt" from the engine spark coming out of the radio speaker.

My longstanding bridge fascination may be a healthy one. I found out later in life that many people have a phobia of bridges -- one that I never had. The only time I ever got worried on a bridge was at the Royal Gorge in Colorado. I didn't think I was in danger; rather, I was worried that my glasses would fall off my nose and down to the Arkansas River 1,053 feet below!

Think, though, of the ways in which bridges serve as metaphors for unity, understanding, and peace. No matter where they may be constructed or what they may cross, they still join together places that would otherwise be separated, sometimes impassably.

In its own way, Easter is a bridge for us. God gives us a means by which we can cross from this world into a foretaste of the next. We have been through death's darkest depths on Good Friday and now we cross to the joy of the feast to come. But you'll notice that the "low" is a necessary part of the experience. It's like that bridge approach on North Dakota Highway 66 west of the Red River's banks; yes, it was too low for traffic to pass through during spring floods, but that's exactly the point! We pass through the drowning waters of death into the eucharistic feast of the resurrection.

And, of course, as we baptize children into the Church, water is the element associated with the death (or drowning) of the old self and the resurrection to new life in Christ.

My beloved bridges take something that was once an obstruction and make the way passable. Think of the obstruction that blocked the

passage to the tomb. When the women came, Scripture recalls that "they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find [Christ's] body" (Luke 24:2-3). That stone was the obstacle thought to block a dead body from critters, scavengers, and pillagers, but once it was removed, the way was made clear for Christ to be raised. And thus, Christ crossed the bridge from death over to resurrection.

But we must not forget the mystical nature of this bridge. It was built by no engineer, no iron worker, and no laborer. It was a bridge invisible to the human eye. Recall Luke's account from our text: "But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened" (24:12). The way in which Christ crossed from death into life was, is, and never will be explainable in physical terms, and, with Peter, we stand in amazement of the bridge to eternal life that God built.

This mystery of Christ's passage from death into eternal life is referred to as the Paschal Mystery. We celebrate this mystery in Holy Baptism, Holy Communion, and, especially, in the season of Easter. We have means by which we partake of the Paschal Mystery in gatherings such as these. Baptism is, as mentioned, a drowning in the waters of death (a flood, perhaps) and a rising to new life in Christ. Holy Communion recalls the body and blood of Christ given and shed for us on the cross and anticipates the feast we will share in the kingdom of heaven. Funerals mourn the loss of loved ones and at the same time proclaim their resurrection.

The Paschal Mystery is, in a way, the bridge that unites these two seemingly disparate events. Death and resurrection are no longer two sides of a river which can never be crossed. Rather, God brings them into a unity in which we participate every time we come to church. This mystery is the greatest of God's good news proclaimed to a world longing to hear it.

And so, we cross a bridge today into a new life. We celebrate God's gift to humanity -- Jesus Christ and his most mystical resurrection. This morning's liturgy is, indeed, a Eucharist...Eucharist coming from the Greek word meaning "to give thanks." This is our giving of thanks for Christ's passage from death to life. The body and blood given and shed for us have become the foretaste of the feast to come.

Today, we give thanks for this bridge that God has built for us, and, in the words of my favorite Easter canticle, we proclaim this is the feast of victory for our God.

Alleluia!

Amen.