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## **Italy Celebrates Near Completion of New Genoa Bridge The Wired Word for the Week of May 10, 2020**

### **In the News**

Two weeks ago, in the Italian city of Genoa, the last massive section of the deck of a new bridge was hoisted into place, completing the 3,500-foot-long backbone of the structure. While the deck still needs to be covered by concrete and then asphalted, the installation of the last section of the bridge's span was marked by a ceremony, limited in scope because of the social distancing still in effect in that country.

At the event, Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte said the imminent completion of the bridge means that from Genoa, "a new light shines, giving hope to all of Italy." He also said that the span "sutures a wound, reconnecting a fundamental artery to the center and heart of this community and city." That was a reference to the collapse of the previous viaduct, Ponte Morandi, in 2018, where one of the main pylons fell during mid-morning traffic, bringing down a 690-foot section of the roadbed on August 14, 2018, killing 43 people. That bridge had been designed and built in the 1960s.

The new bridge, yet to be named, will be a primary artery connecting the two sides of Genoa, which are separated by the Polcevera River and two rail lines, as well as being part of the E80 European highway that links Italy to France.

In addition to the impressive streamlined design of the new bridge (see photos in the links below), part of what makes it remarkable is the speed at which it was built and the fact that it was constructed within the projected cost (about \$216 million, plus about \$98 million for the demolition of the Morandi bridge ), especially in a country where public works projects are not usually known for their efficiency.

The old bridge failed in August 2018. Work on the new one began while the remnants of the old one were still standing, with shifts working 24/7, and continued without stoppage through a change in national government, investigations into the cause of the Morandi viaduct collapse,

debate over whether privatization of Italy's roadways had put people at risk and the ravages of the coronavirus, which caused high numbers of deaths, especially in northern Italy, where Genoa is located, and forced a widespread lockdown.

The new bridge is expected to be open in late July of this year.

The new span was designed by architect Renzo Piano, a native of Genoa, who donated his services to the city. With Genoa having a large shipbuilding industry, Piano designed the underbelly of the bridge to resemble the curved hull of a ship. The completed structure will have sensors and robots inside the deck's sidings to continually monitor the bridge, perform basic maintenance and help authorities respond to increased traffic flows.

By physically reuniting the city, it is expected that Genoa's new bridge will enable many residents to return to more normal patterns of living.

"Genoa is a model for Italy," said Prime Minister Conte at the ceremony when the last section was lifted into place. "And it teaches us that the greatest act of love is when we commit to restarting together. Genoa radiates a light that gives hope to the whole of Italy."

The new bridge is expected to last at least 100 years.

#### **More on this story can be found at these links:**

Italy's Incredible 'Floating Ship' Bridge Reaches for the Sky. CNN

Amid Pandemic, Italy Sees Hope in Genoa Bridge Completion. The Washington Times

Completion of New Genoa Bridge Seen as Symbol of Hope in Italy. The Guardian

#### **Applying the News Story**

The word "bridge" appears nowhere in the Bible, but the concepts of bridging gaps and getting across obstacles do. And the idea of "building bridges" of understanding, of welcome, of reconciliation and similar kinds of connections has long been considered to be among the ways Christians can live out their faith.

So for this lesson, we will consider what it means to "build bridges."

#### **The Big Questions**

1. Is the purpose of metaphorical bridge-building so that you can cross over to where someone else is or that he or she can cross over to where you are or both, or can there be other purposes? Discuss your answers and describe differences.
2. Describe the infrastructure that connects us to God and to the family of God. What are some of the components of that infrastructure? How healthy is it in your own community? If it is "functionally obsolete" or "structurally deficient," what steps are needed to repair it?
3. How important in this multicultural time is it that Christians seek to build bridges with people of other faiths? Why? In your answer, define what is meant by building "bridges."
4. What waters threaten to drown you today? Do you believe that the God who made a land bridge for the Hebrews to pass through the sea on dry land wants to do the same for you in your situation?

5. What emotional factors separate you today from people you don't wish to be separated from? Who would have to start the bridge building for this to change?

### **Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope**

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Isaiah 58:12

Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in. (For context, read 58:1-12.)

These words are addressed to Israelites who have returned to their homeland from exile in Babylon in hopes of rebuilding their lives and prospering. They have found, however, much of Jerusalem and the surrounding area in ruins, and thus are quite discouraged.

They are worshiping God, practicing the rituals of their faith, including fasting (v. 3), but feel like they are receiving no benefit from doing so. Through the prophet, God confronts them about their oppression of the poor and hungry, telling them that the ritual fasting is no good if not accompanied by righteous behavior. Thus, God says, "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?" (vv. 6-7).

If they correct their behavior, however, they will succeed in rebuilding their properties and their society -- they will "raise up the foundations of many generations," as the verse above says -- and they will be known as "the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in."

While in context, repairing the breach probably made one think of wall-building, breaches can also represent divisions between groups. In that case, repairing the breach could be "bridge-building."

**Questions:** Whom do you think of today as a "repairer of the breach"? What breaches is that person attempting to repair? Where are you attempting to build a bridge?

### **Genesis 50:20-21**

Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them. (For context, read 50:15-21.) These are words from Joseph, son of Jacob, to his brothers who had long before sold him into slavery (Genesis 37:25-28). When circumstances first brought them back together, Joseph built a forgiveness "bridge" to them (Genesis 45:1-11), but later yet, after their father died, his brothers feared Joseph had been kind to them only to avoid grieving their father, so in the passage above, Joseph had to build a bridge a second time.

**Questions:** Do some metaphorical bridges need upkeep, just as actual bridges do? Which ones do you have to tend to keep them from collapsing?

### **1 Corinthians 9:19-22**

For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. (For context, read 9:1-23.)

The apostle Paul doesn't use the word "bridge" here, but his description of his work in this passage could be characterized as "bridge-building." He puts himself in service to others on their own terms, that he may testify to them of the gospel.

**Questions:** When have you given up something you were entitled to as a way to put yourself in service to someone else? What was the outcome? When has someone done that for you? What was the outcome? How should we relate to people with whom we find little or no common ground?

### **Ephesians 2:13-14, 17**

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. ... 17 So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near ... (For context, read 2:11-22.)

The apostle Paul is here addressing a problem that was roiling the early church. The church was born in the cradle of Judaism, and virtually all the first believers, like Jesus himself, were Jews. Thus, at the time of the Ephesian letter, there was still a belief among some that for Gentiles to become followers of Jesus, they first had to undergo Jewish initiation rites.

There is not much in the Ephesians letter that speaks directly to this struggle, but it's the subtext of verses 11-22 of chapter 2. And verse 14, quoted above, speaks of how Christ unites both Gentile and Jewish believers into one group.

This, then, helps us better understand verse 17, where Paul speaks of Christ as the one who brought "good news of peace" both to those who were "far" (i.e., the Gentiles, the "outsiders"), and to those who were "near" (the Jews, the "insiders"). Paul declares that they both have access to God through Christ (v. 18) and that they both are a part of God's household (v. 19).

The idea of household in the Greek world carried with it the weight of familial bonding. In other words, Paul is declaring that the Jews and Gentiles are family, through the atoning work of Christ. Moreover, this family comprises the temple of God, where God chooses to dwell (vv. 21-22).

Such a bold declaration was a radical claim in those days. Many of the Israelites believed that the Gentiles were outside God's chosen people and could never be included into the "family" of God. But Paul argues otherwise. The Gentile believers have been included, with the Jewish believers, into the family of God, creating a new temple in which God resides. In effect, Christ is available to all people, and all who accept him are now among God's chosen people.

Considering that Christianity long ago came to exist as a wholly separate faith from Judaism, it is difficult for us today to grasp how radical that viewpoint was during the time of Paul. However, we can have some sense of "outsiders" and "insiders" as we think about whom we'd welcome into our congregations and whom we'd not.

**Questions:** Who is the bridge-builder in this passage? What "bomb" did Jesus drop on the religious class system of his day? What can we learn from Paul's idea of "one body in Christ"? What call does that place on us?

If Jesus can bridge divides between Christians today, what does it take for us to live into that bridging? How should we respond to Martin Luther King Jr.'s comment that "the most segregated hour of Christian America is eleven o'clock on Sunday morning"?

### **1 Timothy 2:3-6**

... God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all ... (No context needed.)

Here Paul calls God "our Savior"; God was not just an implacable bystander watching his Son sacrifice his life for us, but his love for sinners was the driving force that caused him to give his Son for us so that all who believe should not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16).

Questions: What is the role of a mediator between warring parties? How is a bridge a metaphor for Jesus the Mediator? Why is Christ Jesus the one perfect mediator between God and humanity?

### **For Further Discussion**

1. Respond to this observation from TWW team member Mary Sells: "People who were surely affected by the tragic collapse of the previous bridge were part of creating a new bridge -- they were not paralyzed by their fear or grief. What happens when we know we suffer, yet God provides new ways to get us through/over the bad times and into the new days?"
2. Do you ever feel uneasy when crossing a large or high bridge? If so, why do you think that is? (For an example, read TWW team member Stan Purdum's account "Pursued by the Peterbilt" of crossing heavily traveled bridges on his bicycle.) Do you ever feel excited or uplifted when crossing a bridge? If so, why do you think that is?
3. Discuss this, from Genoa bridge construction manager Stefano Mosconi: "Normally it would take three to three and a half years to design and build a bridge of this size. This one took a little over a year," who added that up to 1,000 people were working on the project at the same time. "This bridge is not just a stretch of highway. It also links two parts of the city of Genoa, so it was

very important to have it working as soon as possible," Mosconi said. "We also wanted to respond to a very negative event, a huge tragedy, with a positive force, by building a safer bridge faster than ever before."

4. Discuss the bridge symbolism offered by "a bridgetender with entirely too much time on her hands," and decide what spiritual symbolism you might add.

5. Respond to this: With the underside of the bridge deck being designed to resemble the curved hull of a ship, we were reminded that the first-century Christians viewed the church as a place where the great virtues survive storm and calamity. One of the first symbols that the early Christians used to represent the church was Noah's ark, the vessel on which representatives of all living creatures found refuge during the catastrophe of the great flood. The ark was the place from which those surviving people and animals went forth to repopulate the earth.

In similar fashion, the early Christians considered the church as the place from which God's message went forth to save the world. The main part of a church building, where the congregation sits, is called the "nave" from the Latin word for "ship." You will occasionally see that symbolized today in the stained-glass windows of some churches, where either Noah's ark itself or the dove with an olive branch in its beak is pictured. For the same reason, the arched ceilings of some church sanctuaries are deliberately designed to look like the inside of a ship's hull.

### **Responding to the News**

This is a good time to think and pray about the situations where the "bridges" others have built to us need maintenance and upkeep.

### **Prayer**

O God, help us to live our faith with gentleness and reverence. Enable us to see the great value you place on all humankind, even across great divides in understanding and beliefs. Let our practice of our faith be winsome, warm and welcoming, and always faithful to the example and teachings of Jesus. In his name. Amen.