Bridging the Roads Stewardship Series
"Bridges Exist for Others"
2 Corinthians 8:7-9, Matthew 5:13-16, 28:18-20
Rev. Joy Laughridge
October 24, 2026

One of my adventures during my sabbatical this summer was a trip to New York. Like Jacksonville, New York is a city with lots of bridges,and while I was there this summer, we went for a walk on the Brooklyn Bridge. I didn't know much about the bridge, and my interest was piqued after visiting, but it's been all of this talking and thinking about bridges in the last weeks that finally inspired me to find a book about the bridge and learn about its story. Several days ago, I downloaded *The Great Bridge* by David McCullough and since then I have been hearing all about it in great detail.

As it turns out, the Brooklyn Bridge has a fascinating story. The engineer who designed it was a German immigrant named John Roebling. Before proposing the plans for the Brooklyn Bridge, he had successfully built several other bridges including a suspension bridge, but suspension bridges seemed to be a risky concept at the time, and the bridge he wanted to build across the East River was taller and longer than any that had ever been built. Plenty of people thought it couldn't or shouldn't be done, but Roebling was confident.

The bridge took 14 years to build, and there were difficulties along the way. John Roebling died before construction even got under way. His son Washington took over, but Washington was one of many who got sick with what became known as "the bends" from working on the foundations under water in the pressurized air compartments. He became severely crippled. A few died from the illness and others were killed in other kinds of accidents. The problems only reinforced the sentiments of the skeptics and critics who thought the project

should be abandoned, but even in his crippled stated, Washington Roebling persisted, and the bridge was finally completed in 1883.

The bridge's history since then hasn't been unblemished, there have been other accidents and tragedies, but since it was completed, it has stood fulfilling the purpose that John Roebling had in mind for it. Commuters use it to get in and out of the city. Walkers and joggers use the bridge for exercise, and it has been and continues to be a source of inspiration for artists and photographers. On 9/11, the bridge was literally a lifeline for people who were able to walk across to escape Manhattan when the subways were closed.

Many of you may already know at least some of that history about the Brooklyn Bridge. I feel like I'm probably a bit late to the party in my discovery of its story, but it's a story worth repeating because not only is it fascinating, but also because I think it has some relevance for us on this dedication Sunday.

Today we are invited to make a pledge that will help support and sustain this church's ministry and participation in God's mission. The giving that we do is in service to a project even grander than a suspension bridge like the world has never seen - which the Brooklyn Bridge was when it was built. God's even greater and more ambitious plan, is the plan to reconcile all things and people to himself through Christ and to restore Creation. The Bible reveals that this is the plan that God has been working out since Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, and God is still working *right now* to bring it to completion.

One of the things that is sometimes hard to believe about God's plan, is what Jesus makes so plain in the passages of Scripture that we read this morning. That is that God chooses to use plain old people to make God's love and saving work known so that all people can have a chance to respond and be included. This is what Jesus is

talking about when he says in the Sermon on the Mount, *you are the salt of the earth and the light of the world*.

It's in Genesis that we first read about God incorporating the human element into God's redemptive plans when God makes a covenant with Abrahaman. God called Abraham and his family to live as a people who were set apart. As they lived among the nations, the relationship that they had with God and their obedience to God made them a light that was meant to reveal who God is and what it looks like to have a loving relationship with God and with others.

As it turned out, the challenge of working through humans was that the humans were flawed. Sometimes they were faithful and God's love, and light, and power were revealed beautifully through them, but many times they failed to be faithful witnesses. When Jesus arrived and lived on earth, he was the one person in all of Israel's history who fulfilled the law and bore witness to God's love perfectly. He was crucified, but he rose from the dead, triumphing over sin and death, and he ascended to the right hand of God where he lives and reigns as King of all Kings and Lord of Lords.

In all of this, Jesus did what humans could never have accomplished for ourselves. We *needed* him to step in for us, and it might seem like after the betrayals, and the failures, and the crucifixion, that at that point Jesus would have abandoned the idea of using people to carry on his ministry and be his witnesses, yet when we get to the end of Matthew we hear him commissioning the disciples telling them to go and do the work of making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them to do what he said.

When Jesus preached to the crowds and the Israelites in the crowd heard him saying, you are the salt of the earth and the light of the world, they knew he was speaking to them. And when he asked,

what good is salt if it has lost its saltiness, and what good is a light that is hidden under a bushel basket, they knew they were being challenged. Like the prophets before him, he was reminding them that God intended to use them and faithfulness to their calling mattered – to their neighbors and to God! Though Jesus was originally speaking to the people of Israel who weren't faithfully living out their calling, his words apply just as much to his church that has been commissioned to be his witnesses and carry on the work that he started until he comes.

The church today is likely guilty in all or in many of the same ways that Israel was guilty in their failure to be the salt and light that they were called to be. The church does too much blending in with the culture around us and becomes indistinguishable. We are capable of getting caught up in campaigns and causes that don't align with Jesus's because we think it gives us some kind of advantage. The church can become too preoccupied with saving our own culture, and traditions, and buildings, forgetting that we are indeed a bridge that exists for others. There are examples of when the church has caused or perpetuated harm.

These things happen because the church is made up of flawed and sinful humans who very desperately need the mercy and salvation we have received through Christ, and though we recognize that, sometimes it does feel like enough to make you want to question God. Why would you entrust such important work to *people* who can, and *do,* make such big mistakes and messes? It's like all the skeptics who looked at John Roebling's bridge design and said this is an impossible, terrible, *way too* risky plan. You would be crazy to try to build this thing and even crazier to think that it will fulfill the purpose you have in mind for it! The best thing that you could do right now is *give up* on this project.

Despite the critics and the skeptics, and despite the setbacks and the sacrifices, the Brooklyn Bridge was a risky and ambitious project that was never abandoned by the Roebling family. I mentioned that Washington Roebling was severely crippled after suffering from the bends and was never able to return to the worksite. That would seem like enough of a reason to give up, but he continued the work with the assistance of his wife Emily who became the go-between who consulted with her husband and the work crew. Though he couldn't leave his apartment, he would look at the work site through a telescope and then write down instructions. They worked together in this way until the bridge was finally completed, and for 143 years, the bridge has stood, securely, fulfilling its intended purpose.

As crazy as the idea of the church may seem to our minds or to the minds of others, Jesus and the Scriptures make it clear that it *is* God's plan and purpose to build a building – let's say a bridge – that is built on Jesus, who is the immovable and indestructible foundation. And the bridge is meant to stand in the world as connector so that people who are distant from or disconnected from God can come near as the bridge fulfills its God-given purpose of proclaiming the gospel in word and deed. If we can't come up with reasons of our own to give up on it, there are plenty of people who would gladly supply the reasons why they think we should give up, but as I hear again Jesus's call to go and make disciples, and as I hear him asking, what good is salt that loses its saltiness or a light that is kept hidden, I hear him saying to us, this is no time to give up on the church!

This is not time to give up on the church because the world is still suffering and people are still in need of a Savior. The darkness and the brokenness are on full display tempting us to despair, but Jesus means for his church to continue shining light into that darkness and sharing the hope of the gospel. He means for us to

carry on his ministry as his body filled with his Spirit. Like the desperate, fearful people who needed the Brooklyn Bridge on 9/11 to help them escape Manhattan, our world needs a church that is built on the foundation of Jesus, held together by his love, and empowered by his Spirit to stand as a beacon of hope and to serve as a safe passageway that leads people to the God who loves them. Yes, we are flawed, and we don't have an unblemished record, but even so, God means to use us, and if Jesus has promised to be with us always, *which he has*, and if he isn't giving up on us, *which he isn't*, we shouldn't give up on the church, or on *this* church, either. If you need specific reasons *not* to give up, I can give you three.

There is the person whose life is changed because the Spirit worked through the members and ministry of this church's grief ministry. And there is the person who was homeless and lost in alcohol addiction and is now sober and living independently in a simple home, because the Spirit moved the members of this congregation to be welcoming and to give generously to the Good Samaritan fund that has been a source of assistance. And there is the young man who is now baptized and growing in his faith because the Spirit worked through our youth and our youth ministry to bring him into this fellowship.

These are real stories and real people who have been served by the bridge that is LPC, and their stories offer us a compelling reason to keep believing in God's purpose and plans for our life together and to keep investing in and maintaining the bridge. There are so many more, and the question before each of us today is, do we trust the designer and builder and believe in his plan? Can we ignore the voices of the skeptics and the critics, and listen, instead, to the voice of our Lord Jesus who has loved us, and sent us, and promises to work in us and through us until the end? When we make our pledges today,

it is a way for us to say yes. Yes, we trust. Yes, we are willing to be used. Yes, we believe that you can use us and your whole church.

So we return to the Brooklyn Bridge. It's a story that reminds us that a project that seems too risky or too ambitious can accomplish its purpose when it's built on a solid foundation and its builders persevere. The church is built on the firmest foundation of all, and we are sustained by a builder who has promised to persevere with us until the end. Thanks be to God! Amen.