This is God’s Time to Shine

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Second Week After Epiphany

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Today Steve and the band sang “Bridge Over Troubled Waters” written by Paul Simon and sung by Art Garfunkel. I pulled up the song on YouTube and instantly looking at the album cover art and listening to the song I was back in my childhood home in the 1970’s listening to my mom as she plays the sheet music for this on the piano and sitting next to her on the piano bench singing this song as seriously as a little kid could sing. My mother loved this song. She was a product of the times and Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel spoke to her.

We didn’t have a tv in our house, so we played music. We played music really loud! Whether it was Grieg’s organ concertos or Pink Floyd’s The Wall, we played our records at top volume. We danced a lot in the living room and my mom played the piano and her autoharp and sang all the time. She took her autoharp to school with her and gathered her students around and taught them songs to sing with her in her classrooms whether she was a fifth-grade teacher or a gifted and talented teacher. Kids in Mrs. Burns’ classroom sang!

It is our hope here at West Parish, that you find the space, grace and courage to sing as well! Steve and I would love for you to have the courage and boldness of the kids in my mother’s classrooms to know the music and sing it like you are on stage. You know the old saying, “when we sing, we pray twice.”

Well, here we are in the second week after Epiphany and making it through January 2025. We might be asking ourselves; how do we go on? Where do we find courage, hope, strength for the journey? Well, here is the good news. We can lean into a tradition that goes back thousands of years. We have this deep well of tradition, scripture, practice, sacraments and preaching to help us find light in the darkness, and joy during it all.

Jesus, in today’s Gospel lesson from Luke is preaching to his hometown. It all starts off looking like he’s doing well, and the folks in the village of Nazareth, his hometown, welcome him back with kindness. Immediately before showing up at his hometown, Jesus spent forty days and nights in the wilderness. I don’t think it was a great time for him. After all, who wants to be tempted by the devil and left alone and hungry in the wilderness? So, I am sure he was grateful to head back home to his mom and dads to eat some familiar food and get some well needed rest without sleeping rough.

Jesus shows up at the synagogue and he is the chosen reader of the Torah for the day. He unrolls the scroll and picks the portion he thinks is most appropriate for that time and moment. I don’t know what was happening on the streets in Nazareth or how the times were going for Galilee exactly but Jesus’ thought, maybe listening to the prophet Isaiah can help guide us right now. Isaiah said, and Jesus read these words, “God’s spirit is on me: he’s chosen *me* to preach the Message of good news to the poor, sent *me* to announce pardon to prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, To set the burdened and battered free,  
    to announce, “This is God’s time to shine!” (Luke 4:18-20)

I imagine that the congregation at the temple heard Jesus share the words of Isaiah and some wondered who does this young man think he is. Does he think he is the Message? Does he think he is the one to carry out the prophet Isaiah’s message to the Jewish people? Is he getting a bit too cocky? A few really liked what he read from the scrolls and said, “isn’t this Joesph’s son, the one we’ve known since he was a youngster.” For some of the crowd, being Joseph’s son was a good thing. And for others, they weren’t ready to see Jesus as a new prophet, a Messenger, especially one who seemed to know what God wants them to do.

You know the saying by Thomas Wolfe, “you can never go home again.” For Wolfe’s novel reminds us that, “ "You can't go back home to your family, back home to your childhood ... back home to a young man's dreams of glory and of fame ... back home to places in the country, back home to the old forms and systems of things which once seemed everlasting, but which are changing all the time – back home to the escapes of Time and Memory." [[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/You_Can%27t_Go_Home_Again#cite_note-10)[[1]](#footnote-1)

I wish I didn’t understand this saying by Wolfe as well as I do. I long to go home to my childhood home as well, and yet, it’s been sold several times since my mom’s passing 15 years ago. I can stand on the sidewalk and look at the xeriscape and the new tree plantings in the front yard and see that her stained-glass front door and bay window remain, but it is no longer our house. It is no longer our street. Now, it’s simply a place I used to live.

Jesus was facing some of these same challenges. He returned home, his parents were still alive, but he was different. Something had changed inside him. He wasn’t the same. His time in the wilderness changed him. His baptism in the waters of the River Jordan changed him. And at 30 years of age, he could not afford to turn away from God’s insistent call to him that he must become the living Message. He must be the one to take on a new role, even more challenging than the prophet Isaiah or the wild man of locusts and honey John, he was going to have to become Jesus, the son of God who came to teach us and to ultimately give his life for all of us.

Jesus begins his public speaking with a simple, yet challenging call from his Jewish tradition. This is what we are called to do. 1) Pardon prisoners. Yes, forgive those who have harmed others. 2) Preach the good news to the poor. Jesus meant for the good news to come first and foremost to the poor. Let the hungry be filled with good things to eat. Let the poor find adequate work, safety, good housing, care for their bodies and health, hope for their children, education for all, possibility for the ones who had always been forgotten by the “haves.” 3) Recovery of sight to the blind. Jesus was going to heal those who lost their vision due to inadequate healthcare. He was in the healing business. No longer would people suffer in mind, body or spirit as Jesus would heal folks. He would heal them not because they were good or said the right things or prayed the right prayers. He would heal them because God longed for everyone to be whole. To have vision, to have health, to have hope, to have a future to look forward to.

And then, Jesus turned from saying, this is all about me, to saying this is all about God. This is God’s time to shine! God’s going to be the one who steps in and transforms the world from injustice to justice, from despair to hope. From pain to mercy. From hate to love. This is a world where God shines. And we, we will reflect the light of God from our faces, in our words. With a God like this, how can we keep from singing?

And yes, Jesus knew of the hardship and sorrows of the world. And he, he reminded them, and he can remind us today, that he is a bridge over troubled waters. And we, are called to become the bridge over troubled waters as well.

Paul Simon wrote about how abruptly the song came to him in the middle of the night.  Simon wrote about the song, "Where did that come from? It doesn't seem like me." The title concept was inspired by the title concept was inspired by [Claude Jeter](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claude_Jeter)'s line "I'll be your bridge over deep water if you trust in my name," which Jeter sang with his group, the [Swan Silvertones](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swan_Silvertones), in the 1959 song "[Mary Don't You Weep](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Don%27t_You_Weep)."[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bridge_over_Troubled_Water_(song)#cite_note-13)[[14]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bridge_over_Troubled_Water_(song)#cite_note-zolten-14) According to gospel producer and historian [Anthony Heilbut](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthony_Heilbut), Simon acknowledged his debt to Jeter in person, and handed Jeter a check.[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bridge_over_Troubled_Water_(song)#cite_note-NYDN_Jeter_Obit-15) [[2]](#footnote-2) Simon also named Johann Sebastian Bach’s “O Sacred Head Now Wounded” as an inspiration for part of the melodies. He asked Garfunkel to sing it in the style of a choir boy. Perhaps its popularity at the time and to this day stem from the fact that it hits the right chords musically and personally as many of us have gone through times when we have needed, longed for and every prayed for someone to be a bridge over troubled waters for us. The single won the Grammy Award for Record of the Year, Song of the Year, Best Contemporary Song and Best Arrangement in 1971. And, we are still singing it.

Today, I invite you to sing out loud. Sing out strong. Ask God for the help you need. Let God shine. And don’t be afraid, for it really does take courage, to ask each other to be a bridge over troubled waters as well. For we will all find ourselves at one point or another gazing across a rushing stream, an immense ocean, a difficult diagnosis, a terrible time of grieving, and we will need a bridge to get over our troubled waters. God’s going to be there. And we need to be there right beside one another as well.

Will we have the courage to do what Jesus asked the congregation in his hometown temple? Will we have the courage to ask for help in the waters are troubled?

That remains to be seen. Amen.

1. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/You_Can%27t_Go_Home_Again#:~:text=sorrow%2C%20and%20hope.-,Title,the%20title%20of%20his%20book>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bridge_over_Troubled_Water_(song)> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)