

At the root of our greatest pain in life is the effect of “separation.” Like when a child is preoccupied with a toy in the store, and suddenly Mom or Dad is two aisles away! Is there a greater panic than when a child is lost? We are surrounded by such losses and emptiness. Whether being separated from health, comfort, friendship, or a job makes no difference. Every such moment brings a reality we would rather not have to deal with. To be lost or separated is to be alone. And we are not meant to live alone!

We all struggle with how to find and being afraid to lose. We obsess about keeping everything tied together and come unglued when everything is pulled apart. Life is about what we are connected with and what makes us feel secure and how we respond when we lose the “tie that binds.” That is why these past months have been so difficult. People are tense, angry, bitter, afraid, and much of it has to do with separation.

The theological word for this condition and situation is “sin.” Sin is the action of separating ourselves from God and each other. Sin is the barrier that keeps that connection from being restored. Sin results in the loss of connection that makes us feel alone and is like a wall that keep us from being reunited with the blessings and loves of our lives.

Rather than just the borders, gaps, and barriers that are intentional means of distancing, think about how often and easily and unintentionally we are separated from God and each other. Like how schedules, illness, selfishness, grief, anger, poverty, hatred, insensitivity, and so many other realities of life created gaps or chasms or walls that separate and isolate. Almost every conflict has to do with the distancing we call sin.

Why do we allow separations to occur? Why do we build walls? How do we miss the opportunities we have before hearts become hardened or sin’s separation becomes like an impossible separation? Why do we push God and others away and then complain about feeling so alone?

There is a human response to such barriers or divisions, and it is called a bridge. A bridge lifts us over barriers. A bridge spans gaps that are far and wide. A bridge allows us to be connected with what we could not reach or transports us from one place to another. Bridges are our solution to earthly separations.

One can choose to focus on what separates or divides or one can chose to build or cross over a bridge. But the longer we stay off the bridge, the harder it is to find our way back over. The longer we live without the connection, the harder it is to remember the purpose for being connected. The longer we fail to live with the bridge, the longer we stay on our own side alone. And when we forget God’s solutions, it is worse.

For instance, prayers can become infrequent, and then nonexistent. And suddenly there is a great pain or loss and we can’t remember where that bridge is or how to use it. And there is nothing more painful than that loss.

We are used to separations between nations, or among those with different political perspectives. We know how illness can change our lifestyle and anger can lose a relationship. But the ultimate separation is death. And the greatest loneliness is to be separated from God and unable to find our way home.

One of the dangers of human separation is that we become too comfortable in that darkness and are too proud to remember there is help! Paul reminds us that in his love, God has come to us. He is the bridge builder. He has reached across the boundaries of life and death, and the divisions that we created and seek.

Like a tremendous suspension bridge hanging over a chasm thousands of feet deep, God reaches out to us in love. In the cross we see the perfect metaphor of a bridge – God's plan end to all separation.

The vertical piece of a cross reminds us of the bridge from heaven to earth a construction project that only God can offer. Like Jacob's ladder it is a stairway to heaven! In the gift of Christmas, heaven touched earth. In the miracle of Easter earth is lifted to heaven. A bridge has been built and is ready to be used.

The horizontal piece of the cross reminds us of the bridge from one of us to each other (like a parent to child, or a reconciling husband to wife, or even a stranger to neighbor, or a democrat reaching out to a republican. Such acts of servant love are gifts from God, bridges that are waiting to be crossed, and ready for those who see God rather than our weakness as the road to travel.

This is the stuff of what we call the Gospel. It is a new creation. A new bridge. It announces the end to the barrier of sin and the separation called death. Our world struggles daily and mightily with separation – and we spend a lifetime building "bridges" that seek to bring together what we have lost or fear losing.

We find cures for cancer. Political solutions for impossible problems. Peace treaties to end wars. Reconciliation restores marriage. But no matter how wise or strong we are, we cannot bridge the gap of death and many of our building projects are not always strong or complete enough to accomplish a world that is broke and separated by sin.

Paul reminds us that God has already done the impossible – destroying the ultimate separation called death by crossing that barrier with his own life. We can never escape death on our own (but can cross over Jesus to live.)

In the same way, barriers between each other are bridged by Jesus' servant love and he gives the model and the example of how that love works. We who have been expert at demolition of bridges are now given the ability to cross bridges that can never be destroyed.

Shahram Hashemi, a foreign student at New York City's LaGuardia Community College and the founder of the school's brand- new Amnesty International student chapter, was on his way to the Bank of New York on Wall Street, where he works as an intern, when the second hijacked plane slammed into the south tower of the World Trade Center. "It was a moment I will never forget," states Hashemi.

"It was dark and fire was everywhere. You couldn't breathe. We knew that at any moment we could die. So I told [a] fireman, I don't have anyone here, my name is Shahram Hashemi and just in case anything happens to me, let my family know." The fireman said he would, embraced the unknown young man and then made the sign of

the cross. "Christ protect you," he said. Shahram, a Muslim, wept.... He never saw that fireman again.¹

"If Christ is for us who can be against us? Nothing can separate us from the love that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Christ is the bridge we couldn't build – don't deserve – and can never be destroyed ... with him firmly in place, is there any other way to travel and be safe but through Him? How awesome to never have to worry about separation again.

How important for us to help share roadmap for others, so that they can find the same bridge over impassible and impossible barriers and emptiness!

Such is faith ... "if God is for us ... nothing can separate us from his love ... and if nothing can separate us ... how that changes how we live – and love!

¹ --Ron Lajoie, "Courage of the morning," Amnesty Now, Winter 2001-2002, 12-13.