

20<sup>th</sup> August 2020

## Bridges

**“With weeping and with laughter  
Still is the story told,  
How well Horatius kept the bridge  
In the brave days of old.”**

*Thomas Babington MacAulay, Lays of Ancient Rome*

The Forth Bridge is one of the most iconic of Scottish landmarks. Spanning the Firth of Forth on the rail line from Edinburgh to Aberdeen, this masterpiece of Victorian engineering was completed in 1890 and is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Mistakenly referred to as “The Forth Rail Bridge”, to distinguish it from the Forth Road Bridge and the Queensferry Crossing which are close by, it doesn’t require “rail” at all. It was the first – and, arguably, is the best and most important – bridge across the Forth. No surprise it’s been voted Scotland’s greatest man-made wonder.

In St Paul’s letter to the Galatians (2:11-14) there’s reference to a big row in the early Church, a dispute between Paul and Peter, centred on whether newly converted Christians (the Gentiles, or non-Jews) should live according to Jewish laws and adopt cultural norms. But I’m not at all sure about the protagonists. Paul was certainly on one side, but scholars suggest the leader of the opposing camp was James, the brother of Jesus, and that far from Peter being an opponent, he is, in effect, a bridge-builder, someone looking to bring the two sides together.

It was ever thus. In Church and society, politics and philosophy, science and commerce, families and communities, there have always been disagreements. Some are trivial and create more heat than light. Some are crucial, and, unresolved, lead to violence and pain. So we’ve always needed bridge-builders who, when needed, can bring two sides together, effect reconciliation and, ultimately, help to avoid unnecessary conflict.

From Peter in a Church dispute, through Horatius defending his ancient bridge, to the builders of the Forth Bridge, our world needs bridge-builders. Might we be included in that number?

### **A prayer for today**

*God of healing and wholeness, help me to be a bridge-builder, to seek reconciliation and togetherness, as a sign of your purpose of acceptance for all. Amen*

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