



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

---

### **The Journey VII: The Bridge**

**By Matt Hook**

I'll give an Easter Egg to anyone who can tell me who Dr. David B. Steinman is...the designer of the Mackinac Bridge.

Before the Mackinac Bridge was completed in 1957, the only way to make the five mile trip across the Strait of Mackinac between the Upper and Lower Peninsulas was a very slow ferry ride. (Anybody here take that ferry?)

The Mackinac Bridge is one of the largest single span bridges in the world. The suspension bridge measures 8,614 feet; the total length of the bridge and its approaches is 26,444 feet. Built on piers 206 feet deep, with towers rising 552 feet above the water, it is hung on two cables, each 24 1/4 inches in diameter. In each cable there are 12,580 strands of wire, with a total length of 42,000 miles. Quite literally, each cable had to be "spun" one strand at a time, since its 12,500 ton weight could not be lifted! Construction of the bridge took 3 1/2 years at a total cost of one hundred million dollars. (Even more than redoing the historic Dexter viaduct!) The Mackinac Bridge is both a remarkable engineering feat and a work of art. It is capable of 6,000 cars per hour. Most important of all, the bridge has joined the Upper Peninsula and Lower Peninsula, eliminating a geographical barrier, and has proved the wisdom of those who guided it through its financing, designing and building.

The Mackinaw Bridge is immense. And yet, the reason it had to be so immense, is because the distance, the depth, and the need of thousands of people a day to cross it is even more immense. Some of you here today are facing immense issues, problems, and needs. Some of you are here are looking at the distance and the depth of what you're facing wondering "How can I get across this chasm", while others are saying "Across? How about just some help to make it through this day?" Some of the chasms are ones we've created, and others are just natural results of life. The chasms of our lives, like the chasm of water between the peninsulas, are built in, as naturally ugly as the natural beauty of the land and waters that separate the peninsulas. And we live surrounded (trapped, or stranded?) by these chasms.

What these chasms do is cause to struggle with emotional pain. This pain or emptiness you and I feel manifests itself in over-extended living. In trying to move from our shore to the opposite one, we over-work, over-eat, over-commit, over-spend, over-spiritualize, and over-obsess about love and sex. We commit suicide on the installment plan when we harbor resentment, cultivate self-pity, nourish shame, and refuse to forgive.

**We live with chasms of broken relationships.** We naturally look at others suspiciously or wrongly (lustfully, greedily, pride-fully). We naturally spend our lives comparing ourselves against other people (competitively or fearfully). You just have to look at the way we often treat those nearest to us to see it. Our broken relationships are just one manifestation. The real reason is:

**We live with chasms of sin.** We naturally are victims of the built-in sin in our lives. Like swinging a bucket of water over our heads, or like a spinning Midway ride, sin is like a sick centrifugal force—it pulls everything away from us, including ourselves. Sin even pulls us apart on the inside. The wickedness and true power of sin is that it does all this without our being aware of it. Because we're focused on ourselves,

because we've taken God (who is the center of the universe) out of the center of our lives, we try to live for ourselves. And in the process, we create a gaping chasm all around us.

**We live with the chasm of eternity.** We naturally have big questions: Who am I? What is my place in the universe? What happens when I die? Was I made for more than this life? Now, because we're naturally self-centered, we look within our selves. This only creates deeper crevasses and chasms. This never truly bridges the gaps of our lives.

**We don't realize that Jesus' death on the cross proved God's love and forgiveness.** We don't realize his resurrection proves God's acceptance of his sacrifice. And it means we never have to be alone anymore. Instead, we go around trying to prove our innocence, comparing ourselves to everybody else. We put on masks pretending that it's working. My mask bumps up against yours, and we never, ever really connect. We usually just dig a deeper chasm. Or we increase our isolation. We surround ourselves with objects and relate only with them. We idolize our hobbies, TV, and our stuff, as though it can bridge the gaps in our lives. We're like Tom Hanks in the movie *Castaway*: half the dialogue was him talking to a volleyball. How absurd, and how sadly accurate...

Listen to what Jesus told his disciples just before his crucifixion and resurrection in John 14:1-7 "*Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.*" Thomas said to him, "*Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?*" Jesus answered, "***I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.***"

Jesus has created a way. He IS the Way. He lived, died, and rose again in order to be the bridge across the chasms of our lives. The bridge of Jesus Christ and his presence is not to be experienced only occasionally. The indwelling Christ is to become the shaping power of our lives. Jesus Christ is the one and only way to bridge the chasms of broken relationships, sin, and eternity. There is only one way the journey of life fits together, and that's God's way. We must never think that we are crossing a bridge Jesus has not crossed—in a relationship, in temptation, or in life.

### **Jesus bridges the Chasm of Broken Relationships.**

Jesus is the truth and reveals the truth. If we are experiencing Jesus, it means we will be a church living on the edge—of people's hurts, of people's questions, of people's doubts, in order to let Christ connect us build a bridge through Christ to be a presence in their lives. The closer you and I grow to Jesus, the more we can be the one to reach across the chasm. Because of Jesus' resurrection, I no longer have to compete. Talk about a chasm—we are taught to measure ourselves AGAINST each other. (How well we compete, how much better we are than someone else or the average.) It impacts everything: school & grades; sports & winners & losers; business & profit. The entire way we view others, our opinion of them is directly related to how they compare, in skills, education, looks, talents, character, and more.

On the bridge of Christ, our perspective changes. We see the chasm. As two sides of a bridge we don't compete, we cooperate. We each have different functions, but our differences don't make us any better or worse than anyone else. Each contributes. Each of us is necessary!

How exciting this is. No longer am I any more important or less important. Do you see the implications? With Christ as our bridge, I am released of jealousy. I can find fulfillment in being who I am, rather than wanting to be like someone else. My friendships aren't distorted by status—I am awed by none and look down on none. I appreciate others for themselves, without feeling they must be different or must be like me. This is the first key to walking across that chasm of broken relationships.

Are you part of a chasm-free, connected community of Christians? Is your marriage chasm-free? Your family? Because of the resurrection, every relationship can be based on the bridge of Jesus' love, whether or

not the other person knows Jesus is the Risen Lord. He IS the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We know of no other way. Because of Jesus' resurrection, he bridged the chasm to us. We now have the spiritual resources to build bridges to others, even across the dangerous waters of broken relationships. That's exactly what Jesus did when he rose again. We rejected him with everything we had, and he came back. It takes an awful lot of forgiveness. *I can't do it. You can't do it.* But Jesus has gone before us to prepare a place for us. When we realize Jesus *has already done it*, we then can simply cross the bridge that exists. Then we can set that other person free.

To love is to be vulnerable. To reach out, to reach across is to be vulnerable, however with Jesus Christ as our bridge, we need never fear. The more we walk in the footsteps of Jesus, the more new horizons we are free to reach. We give people the touch of human love. We don't need to judge them. You cannot treat the other person as though Jesus didn't die for them and expect to walk the bridge to them.

As a Christian, you can be a realist. You don't need to be afraid to walk across the worst, the ugliest, or the most painful chasm facing you. You can express your grief, sorrow, hurt, loneliness, and struggle. That's what Jesus means when He says "*I am the Truth.*" Because of Jesus, we can really connect—in a world of buffer-ridden people where usually only their masks connect.

Listen to these "one another's": John 13:34 "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.*" Romans 14:19 "*So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.*" Romans 15:5-7 "*Be of the same mind with one another...with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.*" I Cor. 11:33 "*wait for one another.*" Eph. 4: 25, 32 "*Lay aside falsehood, speak truth...Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*" Phil. 2: 3 "*with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves*". Col. 3: 12 "*put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.*" 1 Peter 4:8 "*Keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another.*" 1 John 4: 11 "*Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.*"

**Jesus Bridges the Chasm of Sin.** "*For Christ died to rescue us from the penalty of our sins.*" Heb. 9:15 (LB) The centrifugal force of sin is erased. Jesus lived the perfect life and died in our place. We simply need to ask forgiveness and receive it in gratitude. It is our most important act of placing God at the center of our lives again. "*All of us have sinned... yet God declares us 'not guilty' if we trust in Jesus Christ, who in His mercy freely takes away our sins.*" Romans 3:23-24 (TLB)

We can't bridge the chasm of sin apart from the bridge of Jesus Christ. His cross forged the way, and his resurrection gave us the way to follow on him.

#### [SONG: THE GREAT DIVIDE]

(There's a bridge to cross the great divide/there's a cross to bridge the great divide)

**Jesus Bridges the Chasm to Eternal Life.** People are in search of eternity more than ever before. These are the words we began with 7 weeks ago: The way out of this chasm of loneliness and lostness, meaningless, purposeless living is God's reply: Come on a journey with me: A journey beyond meaningless and purposeless living. Jesus says "I have a map. I AM the Way. Enter into a **JOURNEY** with me – through mountains, valleys, swamps, and vistas. Together we'll get across the chasms of life. Even the broken relationships. Even the sin that so easily trips you up. Even for all eternity. It's a journey to the cross, and every one of you will need to go through the cross, just as Jesus did. But on the other side of the cross is a bridge—the one and only bridge of Jesus Christ. In his resurrection, we have the assurance of a greater journey with Him. Eternal life doesn't just mean longer life. It means fuller, richer, more adventurous and abundant life than we've ever known, through no other way than the precious life and resurrection of my Son, Jesus Christ.

To cross the Mackinac Bridge, we must pay a toll. To cross the bridge of Jesus Christ, the price has already been paid, by Christ himself. We simply respond by living our lives out of thankfulness. He has come to cross the chasms you can't make it over. He still moves stones. Your chasms are no match for God. Your sins are forgiven. Your relationships can be made whole. Your eternal destiny assured. Jesus is the one and only bridge upon which you can make it over.

Eph. 1:20 (LB) *"I pray that you will begin to understand how incredibly great his power is to help those who believe him... the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead."*