

## Engineers for the Church, Builders for God

(James 1:17-27)

Sermon delivered by The Rev. Matt Rhodes at Christ Church, Millwood, Virginia  
The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost, September 2, 2018

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our strength and our foundation. Amen.

If you were ever to spend some time perusing the shelves at my house or swiping through the Kindle app on my iPad, you would undoubtedly notice several books scattered or downloaded here or there about great engineering marvels.

There's one by Stephen Ambrose, *Nothing Like It in the World*, on the design and construction of the transcontinental railroad. One of my personal favorites is David McCullough's *The Great Bridge*, the majestic history of John and Washington Roebling and the building of the Brooklyn Bridge. There is a book about the first-ever, 852-foot, 59-second flight by the Wright brothers at Kitty Hawk. I have downloaded a volume on the building of the Hoover Dam and one on the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge. And somewhere in the boxes in our basement are histories of the Empire State and Chrysler Buildings in New York.

I am utterly fascinated by the engineering, design and construction of marvels like the ones I just listed. In large part it is because I have so much admiration for the men and women who have been blessed with the extraordinary gifts and abilities to build incredible skyscrapers, soar among the clouds, and venture into the stars – gifts I do not possess. I can hardly drive a nail straight into a board or build a house out of playing cards, and I have no doubt that the residents of San Francisco and New York and all those who fly aircraft or soar into outer space would be grateful that I was not involved in any of those things.

But while I was not called to any of those things, while I was not gifted with those particular sets of skills, I have nonetheless been called to use the gifts I **do** have to serve as a different type of engineer. In truth, we have **all** been called in our own ways to be engineers ... builders ... creators. As we just heard in the Epistle of James, we have been tasked by God to be **doers** – not simply to see things that should be done or to listen about things that are needed but to **get out** and **do something** to address those needs.

Those who looked at the East River or the vast expanses of the American landscape, those who looked up at the sky and gazed out at the stars, saw something to be done or a challenge to be met and they rose up and did it. They dreamed big and built bigger; they set out to take small steps to change the world and in doing that they made **history**.

I think this passage from James is an excellent one to keep in mind as we enter our season of stewardship. Between now and the end of the year, each one of us has the opportunity to

consider how we can be dreamers ... engineers ... builders. We will have time to ponder the dreams we have for this church and how we can build it up. In the weeks ahead, our stewardship campaign will challenge us to look anew through the lenses of time, talent and treasure to see where we can build bridges, what expanses we can cross, and what we can do to help this community and the world around us to soar just a bit higher.

Again, it is more than just dreaming or considering; as James reminds us, it is ***doing***. The most recent issue of the parish newsletter (which I hope you have all received) includes a letter about meeting the goal of trying to find new ways of getting involved or increasing your support of the programs and ministries of this church. We are each being encouraged to do more, and you will hear more about that in the near future.

The work of God in creation yielded first fruits, which in Hebrew tradition is the first share of the annual harvest brought to be shared as an offering. We ***are*** those first fruits. Now it is time for us to plant and reap a harvest and offer ***our*** first fruits back to God. God has given us the gifts and the tools to accomplish his work in the world, and it is up to us to continue doing that work. We will each discern how best to do that in the coming year ... how we will each put to use that with which we have been blessed.

While we may share a common vision, we will each have different ideas on how to accomplish that vision ... of how to build our dreams for this parish into reality. Different opportunities and yes, even different challenges, will hold different appeal for us. But in setting our minds to being doers, those opportunities and challenges will allow us opportunities to share.

They will give us opportunities to be ***gift givers***.

In building the Brooklyn Bridge, the Roeblings gave the residents of two boroughs in New York City the gift of an easier life by being able to cross the East River in a shorter amount of time. The transcontinental railroad gave Americans the gift of being able to travel from coast to coast not in weeks or months, but in days. Wilbur and Orville Wright and that first flight 115 years ago gave us the gift of no longer having to be bound to the earth but instead being able to in the words of the sonnet by John McGee “[slip] the surly bonds of earth and [dance] the skies on laughter-silvered wings.”<sup>1</sup>

In whatever we design, in whatever we build, in whatever we do, we will be making gifts of ourselves – of our time, our talent and our treasure. In whatever we offer and however much we commit to doing, ***we will be blessed***. As James has written, doers who act will be blessed in their doing.

May each of you be blessed in your prayers and discernment, in your giving and your doing.

Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> John Gillespie Magee, Jr. “High Flight.” <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/highflig.htm>