

Sermon for the Covenanting Service of Rev. Sang Won Cha

Yoko Kihara

Rev. Sang Won Cha, Congratulations on your new ministry in the community of the Trinity Memorial United Church. It is a great honour for me to preach the sermon at this covenanting service, but honestly, I was wondering why Sang Won asked me. We have a great Taiwanese minister, Yi-Jang Brian Tsai in Fraser Presbytery. In Asian culture, we respect senior people, and I think Yi-Jang is much more suitable than me to talk about the Intercultural Ministry.

However, after receiving the life story of Sang Won, I found that we have a lot of common grounds in our faith journeys. In 1990, Sang Won was led to Dumaguete city in Negros island in the Philippines, received theological education and training at Silliman University, and worked as a minister there for four years. I also visited Dumaguete and studied at the Divinity School of Silliman as an exchange student from my theology school in Japan in 1994. It was a life-changing experience for me. So, I can understand how deeply, Sang Won was inspired and how wonderful, the experiences he had in the community of Dumaguete.

After the ministry in the Philippines, Sang Won went back to Korea, and worked as a social worker in the community in Daejeon City. I can also understand why he didn't work as a minister in the hierarchical church, but chose to work with the most vulnerable people in the community. For, in the Philippines, at least in Dumaguete, the community, the church, and the theology school were entirely connected and worked together like the union of the Trinity.

When I served the inner city church of Tokyo, I also focused on the out reach ministry for children and families, and for foreign people who are struggling based on the experiences in the community of Dumaguete.

Then, after the ministry in Korea, Sang Won moved to Japan to serve the Korean Community, the people who were forced to come to Japan and worked like slaves during the military occupation by Japan, and who also had been marginalized for many long years in the Japanese society. I think that Sang Won must have tremendous experiences in the marginalized and strong Korean Japanese community, because I have also had wonderful experiences through friendship with the youth group of the Korean Christian Church in Japan.

I believe that God led Sang Won to this greatly diverse situation in Canada through all these experiences in the Philippine, in Korea and in Japan. I also believe that this is the best place for Sang Won to make the best use of his experiences. But, I think it may be not only exciting but also challenging for Sang Won to work for the intercultural ministry here, because usually, ethnic groups are segregated from each other, and White, Anglo-Saxons are still the dominant group in the United Church of Canada. Although the United Church of Canada has dared to be more inclusive, and now we are trying to be intercultural, we are just in the starting point.

Today's scripture sentences in Isaiah 42 remind us of the sensitivity that we need when we serve the most vulnerable people. Sang Won, you and I are called to serve the people who came to Canada recently, who are in unstable situation, who are lonely and in brokenness, and are struggling with their cultural identities. We should be careful not to break '*a bruised reed*' and not quench '*a dimly burning wick*'. But, we need not to worry about it too much, because we are also living in unstable lives, are sometimes really lonely, and are always struggling with the identity issue of ourselves and our children in everyday life. We are called to be here to serve the most vulnerable people, not only because of our skills and experiences but also our weakness and vulnerability. Sometimes, we may lose confidence because of a lack of knowledge about this Country and a cultural gap, but I believe that God will make the best use of our weakness and brokenness.

So, Sang Won, don't worry, and trust God and the people surrounding you. You are surrounded by your wonderful family who has followed and supported you for many years. You are also surrounded by friends of Trinity Memorial United Church who are willing to accept you and to work with you. You are also surrounded by friends of Fraser Presbytery who welcome you and will try to learn from you. When I came here, the Presbytery Meeting was the worst place for me to understand what was happening there. But, some friends in this Presbytery have walked with me and always helped me, and thanks to their friendship and love, I really enjoy the meeting and gathering of the Presbytery, now.

Although I had a bunch of stories of trouble and struggle after coming to Canada, I want to share the story of a beautiful encounter. The first year in Canada, I tried to attend as many conferences of the United Church as possible to improve my English ability and to learn about the United Church. When I attended the Worship Matters conference in Vancouver, I joined one workshop of embodied prayer.

We made small groups and I was invited to be the centre of the small circle. The instructor told me to let my body be free, and to lean against the people shaping the circle trusting them according to the song of “Cradle Me in Your Arms” in More Voices. Although I tried to lean, my body became firm like a statue, and I could not move. Suddenly, I found that I had not trusted Jesus and the people surrounding me but was trying to stand by myself, and unconsciously a lot of tears flew out. I totally lost control of my emotion. At the moment, one big white woman gave me a deep hug, and patted my head gently. As she was very tall and big, my body was totally wrapped in her arms. I didn’t know who she was and didn’t ask her name, and she did not ask mine. But, it was OK. I felt God’s wings in her arms, and I found that we could be compassionate and understanding of each other beyond language and cultural differences.

In the process of the intercultural ministry, there will be a lot of confusion, misunderstanding, and miscommunication happening because of our cultural gaps. But, I believe that we can embrace them as gifts of God, and we can understand each other beyond our differences. I also believe that we can find who we are more deeply and profoundly in the process to be an intercultural church, and we can be truly ourselves and be truly God’s beloved children. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.