

Nothing Is Impossible! *Luke 1: 26-56*

Favorite English Word

I believe you know me and my wife Juhee. Can you guess Juhee's favorite English word? It's 'Joy,' not 'Yohan.' Because Juhee likes the word, 'joy,' Juhee has named our dog, "Joy" even though Joy is male. Many people still confuse his gender identity. One good thing is that Joy will never know his name is a female name.

Can you guess my favorite English word? It's not 'Juhee' because Juhee is not an English word! If you have received my weekly newsletter, you can guess that my favorite English word is peace. 77 long years of division of Korea and realization of deeply entrenched hostility and hatred in Korean minds toward their own kin, have made me yearn for peace in my motherland. But we know that it is not only Korea, but the whole world that needs peace.

Today is the second Sunday of Advent and the theme of this week is #morepeace. According to a dictionary, the definition of peace is "a state of tranquility, a state or period in which there is no war or a war has ended." But is it really peace? If this definition of peace is correct, the time when Jesus lived was one of the most peaceable times of history. This period is known as Pax Romana, Roman Peace. The Roman empire conquered other nations and tribes and suppressed them with their superior military power. Of course, there was relative peace and fewer military conflicts during this period but Roman peace was built upon the tears and blood of the conquered and the oppressed. Can we really call this peace? The biblical understanding of peace is quite different from this understanding of peace. The conventional notion of peace seeks for *status quo* of society. However, God's message of peace first breaks the state of tranquility for more peace.

Good News Breaks Peace

In today's scripture reading, we've heard another story of an angel delivering a message. This time, God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary and Gabriel announced the good news that "you will become pregnant and give birth to a son and call his name Jesus. He will be great, be called 'Son of the Highest!'" Does this sound like good news? It certainly sounds like good news for us but not quite for Mary. This news from Gabriel was like a stone that broke the tranquility of Mary's life. She was about to get married to Joseph and perhaps, a new life she dreamed of seemed to await her. But out of the blue, an angel appeared and said to her, "you will bear a child who will be great but that child is not Joseph's!" Being pregnant before marriage alone could have resulted in a severe and humiliating sentence for Mary, especially if Joseph rejected her. She could even have been stoned to death if her family knew the child was not Joseph's. Gabriel's good news sounds like bad news for Mary and it surely disturbed her peace.

When we hear the words, 'good news,' we tend to expect something good to happen that will resolve our problems and calm down our stress, anxiety or fear and lead us to peace. But God's good news does not simply make us live a life with inner tranquility in our comfort zone. Rather, the good news sometimes breaks our tranquility, invites us to move out of our comfort zone and, take a risk to embark on a new journey for more peace.

Our lives are full of surprises, both good and bad, and many challenges. We may face numerous storms in our life sailing. We want to dodge all risks as much as we can. But it has been said, "life is not about how to survive the storm but how to dance in the rain." Instead of attempting to avoid all risks, we should take them as opportunities for growth, especially when

they are part of God's calling for us. Janet Rand wrote, "...risks must be taken, because the greatest risk in life is to risk nothing. / The person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing, is nothing, and becomes nothing. / He may avoid suffering and sorrow, but he simply cannot learn, feel, change, grow or love... Only the person who risks is truly free." Good news frees us by breaking our false sense of security and tranquility. It invites us to take risks and live a fearless life for more hope, more peace, more joy and more love!

Some of you may remember that our church received several calls and emails of complaint from an irate neighbor after we elected a memorial for the Uvalde school shooting victims. This neighbor demanded that we immediately remove the memorial from our church property. Her complaints reached the point that we had concern for the safety of our staff members. After discussion at an emergency church council meeting, we decided to keep the memorial in place until all the funeral services for victims were done. We stood firm in our solidarity with victims of gun violence and also sent petition letters to our officials to reform unjust gun laws. We took some risks for more peace and more justice. In the following weeks, Asbury UMC also received several calls from neighbors who expressed their gratitude for providing a beautiful place for remembering and praying for victims. By taking a risk for more peace, we shared our small light of peace with our neighbors.

Mary Accepted God's Calling!

Dr. Marcia McFee said, "We spend so much time wishing things were not the way they actually are. Our ability to creatively see how God might be working *within* our undesired situation is diminished by all the energy we spend on the denial or passively waiting for things to change *for us*. Peace comes when we accept *what is* and are able to use our energy to live into the *what's next*." Instead of waiting for things to be more peaceful, how can we be the ones to offer more peace?

We accept God's calling, no matter how it sounds. Mary heard somewhat disturbing good news from Gabriel, however, unlike Zechariah who doubted God's words, Mary accepted God's word. Mary wondered how this could happen since she was a virgin. The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, the power of the Highest hover over you; Therefore, the child you bring to birth will be called Holy, Son of God... Nothing is impossible with God." Mary knew the risk. She knew the challenges ahead of her, but she accepted God's calling for her to be the mother of the Son of God. She said, "Yes, I see it all now: I'm the Lord's maid, ready to serve. Let it be with me just as you say." By accepting her calling through obedience and by taking the risk, she moved closer to God and found more peace as an instrument of more peace for others.

We are called to be messengers of peace. Mother Teresa said, "If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other." How can we be the messenger of peace? By reminding others that we belong to each other and we are all children of God regardless of our disagreements and differences. If you still feel that it's hard to be the messenger of peace, I will tell you the easiest and the most effect way! Do you know how? Just sit and eat together. The Korean word for peace is 평화, which consists of two Chinese characters. The meaning of two letters can be translated like this. "Sharing grain equally into everyone's mouth." If you don't know how to be the messenger of peace, invite people, especially, those who are marginalized and share a meal with them. Peace can begin with that small act! We may wonder if that is enough. But God can use our small act of kindness for a greater purpose. Remember, nothing is impossible with God! So don't worry about how small our acts seem to be. Trust God.

Nothing is impossible with God! And do what you can do to share the message of peace and be messengers of peace. Amen.