

By Faith
Hebrews 11:29-12:2

I hope you enjoyed Victory Day last Monday. I don't know if you remember or not, but I told you how Victory Over Japan Day relates to National Liberation Day of Korea. August 15th is National Liberation Day of Korea and this year is 77th anniversary. The history of the two nations is closely intertwined. While the United States helped Korea to regain its freedom from Japanese colonial rule, Korea was divided by two global superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, right after the liberation. No Korean was involved in this decision to divide their nation. At the beginning, it was just an arbitrary line, but it gradually became a heavily guarded military barrier. Koreans were soon divided by ideology, and these dividing lines in their hearts and in the land made them hate each other. The Korean War, started by North Korea, left indelible trauma on the souls of all Koreans. The Korean War lasted for 3 years and Korean War casualties numbered nearly 5 million. Though a ceasefire of the Korean War was issued in July 1953, the war is technically still not over. This year marks 77 years of division. Who is responsible for this division? I don't know. But I know one thing for sure that we, as Christians, are called to be instruments of peace. What can we do for the peace and reconciliation of Korea and the world? We pray. We pray together, which is the most powerful thing we can do now.

Each year, the World Council of Churches (WCC) provides a Prayer for Peace & Reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula. Would you mind if your pastor asks you to join in praying for his motherland? Please see your bulletin and join this joint prayer.

O Lord, how long shall we continue to keep the division on the Korean Peninsula?

When will peace come to the painful and broken land of Korea?

When will the South and the North lay down the weapons aimed at each other, hold each other's hand, and sing a song of peace?

When will you lift the thick shadow of division?

O Lord, we have been living in pain of division for a long time.

Following the brotherly Korean War with its incalculable number of deaths, countless families were separated by the war and many people lost their livelihood.

The forces of the division system are the major stumbling blocks in the path toward peace and reunification while military tensions are rising on the Korean Peninsula in the midst of mistrust.

Our hearts break when we look at the rusty barbed wire.

O Lord, grant your healing grace to those suffering from the wounds of division.

Help us to stop demonizing each other but instead to pursue peace and coexistence.

Empower us to take down the rusty barbed wire and the desires of all who block the way of peace.

Grant us love that encourages us to overcome suspicion and hatred.

Help us to discover the truth in ourselves that we can become agents of peace and reconciliation through your grace.

O Lord, have mercy on us in your compassion, that churches in the North and the South may gladly respond to your love in a faithful commitment to the journey of peace. Give us the strength and resilience to go beyond division and work together for peace through dramatic improvement and development of inter-Korean relations. May we rekindle the hopes for peace and reunification on the Korean Peninsula.

O Lord, 77 years of division, there shall be no more tears and pain.

We can no longer be bound in heavy chains of war and conflict.

We cry to you for help, Lord; may we, your people, have open eyes to see and open ears to hear your presence among us along the journey toward peace and reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula.

In the name of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, we pray. Amen.

Thank you. As we pray for peace in Ukraine and other nations, keep praying for peace and reconciliation of Korea. Also, pray for this nation as we are going through this most divisive time. Prayer is the sincerest act of faith. In fact, we cannot continue our faith journey without faith. We live by faith.

But it's also true that often, our faith seems powerless, ineffective, and unreal. And when we don't see any signs of change, we often become weary of practicing our faith. We pray for the unity of our beloved

United Methodist Church, but we have become a divided Methodist church since this May. We pray for peace in Ukraine, but the deadly war continues. We pray for God's peaceable kingdom to come on earth but senseless gun violence continues while nothing seems to change. Then, we grow weary of our Christian life and many people stop practicing their faith.

That's what happened to the early church that received the letter to the Hebrews. They endured persecution and had shown their great love for one another. However, over time, the church didn't see any tangible changes in situations and had become less confident, less enthusiastic, and less cohesive. Some were struggling with their faith. Others were neglecting to gather together (Hebrews 10:25).

But the writer of the letter to the Hebrews reminds us that what we need is not a sign but faith. Faith is not mere feeling or thought. Rather it is an orientation that leads to decisive action when there is no tangible or visible support for that action.¹ So it's not a tangible sign that makes us continue to pray. It's faith that supports us to keep praying even though there seems to be no visible change at hand. By faith, people can do many wonderful things.

By Faith

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land... by faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days... by faith Rahab did not perish... Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets! Through faith, they conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight." They did wonderful things and experienced God's mighty work by faith.

But others suffered mocking and flogging and even chains and imprisonment. Some were stoned to death or killed by the sword. Some became wanderers in deserts and mountains for their faith. Even though their lives of faith were exemplary, not all of them got their hands on what was promised. However, they still lived out their faith. While they had not received what was promised, the Bible tells us that "God had a better plan for us: that their faith and our faith would come together to make one completed whole, their lives of faith not complete apart from ours." This comes from the Message Bible version and I like it. I can see the continuity of faith from generation to generation and how it makes up the whole. "their faith and our faith would come together to make one completed whole!" Their suffering and endurance in faith were not in vain because of you and me. Our faith is not in vain because of those who walked before us, with us, and after us. I believe this is a great comfort and empowerment for us.

As I prepared this sermon, I re-read Asbury UMC 75 anniversary memory book. I recognized some familiar names while many of them were unfamiliar. But what they wrote was not just memories of Asbury but about how our faith stories and life stories come together to make one complete whole. I believe that by faith we can continue to write wonderful stories of faith together. Not all those stories will be joyful. Some stories will include tears and sorrows. But as the Bible witnesses, God has a better plan for us and since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, all our efforts and acts of faith will be made whole in Christ. So my Asbury family, do not be discouraged even if we don't see any tangible results from what we do by faith. Keep praying for the Ukraine. Keep remembering school shooting victims and working to change unjust gun laws. Pray for this divided nation to be reconciled even when the news media tells us otherwise.

By faith, Rev. Francis Spear and some of your parents planted Asbury UMC. By faith, many of our families and friends continue to take care of our beloved Asbury. By faith, all of you are still tending the church, praying for each other, and working for God. And by faith, we will continue to do it until our time on earth ends. Can I get an Amen?

We may not see the church full of people in our generation. We may not receive what is promised, but we can still be exemplars of faith if we continue with faith. My beloved Asbury family, "let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith!" When Christ returns, he will complete what we did through faith. Don't be discouraged but let us run! Run together. Amen.

¹ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/ordinary-19-3/commentary-on-hebrews-111-3-8-16-5>