

**Celebration of New Journey Together in Christ**  
**Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16**

**Intro**

I am really grateful to be here with you this morning as a new member of Asbury United Methodist Church. Whenever I preach in my second language, I've always wished that it would be on the day of Pentecost, so I would not need to worry about my broken English. I have been praying for 11 years asking God to make my English perfect but... God has not fixed it yet. While God has not made my English perfect, God has always blessed me to share the gospel with God-loving people like you. I have been able to preach the gospel in my second language not because I am a perfect English speaker, but because of the love in Christ we share together. And because of this love in Christ, we can begin our new journey of faith together. Again, it is my deepest joy to finally meet you and be a part of this wonderful church.

**We are Different but That's O.K.**

For this first meeting, I felt a formal self-introduction would be an appropriate start. My name is Yohan Go and I am originally from Korea. (Of Course, South Korea) I am an ordained elder of the Korean Methodist Church. I have been in ministry for 15 years. Some say that I look like a teenager or in my early twenties... but actually, I am turning forty-one this year. I have a beautiful wife, Juhee Lee. Juhee is not here with us this morning because she has been appointed as Pastor to Haven UMC. But you will have a chance to meet her and I am pretty sure that you will like her. I have been in the United States for 11 years. For the first four years, I studied theology at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. After enduring the Southern heat in "Hotlanta" for four years, my yearning for the cool breezes of the North led me to Boston in 2012. In Atlanta, 83 degrees is a fair temperature for an outdoor activity but after living in New England for 7 years, I sometimes feel even 73 degrees is hot. I must have become a New Englander. Since 2012, I pursued my Ph. D. Degree at Boston University School of Theology and I am still a kind of student. I think that I have spent too much time in school so I hope to graduate as soon as possible. (But only God knows when it will be) I love hiking and I love traveling. I haven't gone fishing yet but I am willing to learn it if anyone would like to teach me. Of course, I will need to get my wife's permission first as all husbands do.

After hearing my brief self-introduction, you may sense that we have something in common. We are all Methodists who prefer to sit in the back pew rather than the front pew. We are both New Englanders who complain how hot it is when the temperature is only a little over 70 degrees. (Pause)

But, you may also find many differences between you and me. I am not a Rhode Islander so I don't pack a lunch even if I drive longer than 20 minutes. I am Korean. As Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone," I cannot live on bread alone but I have to eat rice and Kimchi, which is a traditional Korean side dish, at least once a day. My nationality, cultural background, education in theology and many other things are different from your own background.

We are different but that's O.K. I can assure you that our differences are not a problem of being one in Christ. Our differences will enrich our new life together in Jesus Christ. In fact, it is not just me but every one of us in this church are different from one other. Look at the people around you. Take a close look. You will never find anyone just like you. We are distinct from each other. Each and every one of us is so unique and special that no one can replace anyone.

I may have replaced Rev. Smith's position but I will never be able to replace her. You have to cherish the precious love and memories that you shared with Rev. Smith. That is God's blessing for this church and each one of you. I will not try to replace her but I will be myself as your fellow Christian and new pastor for this church.

Nobody can replace anybody because God has created every one of us to be unique and precious. This also means that we each have something special to offer to build up this beautiful church. We are like a choir. In the choir, we first need a soprano. But the song the choir sings is enriched by different voices from the alto, tenor, and bass. And now you've got a new Korean American voice within the church. Our differences are God's blessing. Just like a choir, our life together in Christ will be enriched by our differences and the unique gifts we share with one another.

### **Unity in the Body of Christ**

Of course, personal and cultural differences are potential causes of misunderstanding and even conflicts. We may misunderstand our differences for evidence of bad faith or lack of common sense in others. Such conflict stemming from differences was a common problem even in the early church. According to scholars, one such crisis in Ephesian church was a schism between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. Their understanding of Christianity was very different from one another. The Jewish Christians basically understood Christianity as a religious sect within Judaism so they emphasized the significance of keeping all Jewish laws and commandments from the Old Testaments. But the Gentile Christians saw Christianity as a correction or replacement of Judaism so they did not think that keeping Jewish law was a necessary condition for being Christian. Because of this tension within the church, apostle Paul wrote a pastoral letter to the church in Ephesus.

Paul wanted them to remember what Jesus Christ had done for both groups. Paul said, "For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it." (Ephesian 2:14-16)

What Jesus Christ had done on the cross was to break down the dividing wall between us, making one new humanity in him, and reconciled us to God in one body through the cross. We are different but we become one in Christ. This is the fundamental conviction about who we are as Christians. We are different in nationality, culture, language, ethnicity, personal character and

many other things... but we are one in Christ. Jesus Christ and the love in Christ bind us as one body of Christ despite of our differences.

### **Love that bind us one in Christ**

Of course, living with people who are different from us is not always easy. It requires our intentional effort to understand and embrace others. For instance, I know that you are giving extra effort to understand your new pastor's unfamiliar Korean accent as I struggle to correctly pronounce 'faith' which is not to be confused with 'face.'

As Paul taught the Ephesian church, to overcome our differences and to be one in Christ, we need humility that gives us willingness to learn from each other. We need gentleness that allows us to open our hearts and be compassionate to other's weaknesses. We need patience. But most of all, we need love that bind us as one in Christ. Love has the power to bind people as one.

My first appointment was a very small church in a rural area in Korea. There were no church members in the church when I first got there. A young pastor with no church members, what was I supposed to do? "To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world! The world is my parish!" The perfect answer for a Methodist. Isn't it? So I first went to a local community center. But as a young pastor who only studied theology in school, I soon realized that I needed some practical tools to serve people in my community and to reach out to them. So I learned hand acupuncture and became a certified hand acupuncturist. (Do you know acupuncture? It is a form of oriental medicine in which thin needles are inserted into to the body to cure people.) Whenever I did an acupuncture treatment, people always asked me the same question. "Does it hurt?" I always replied, "Don't worry. It does not hurt me" and I stuck needles in their hands. No matter how many needles I put in their hands, it did not hurt me at all because at the end of the day, they were not my hands.

But think about when your children or grandchildren were sick. When someone whom you dearly love was sick... when they were in their agony and there is nothing you could do for them, how did you feel? It hurt. It really hurts us. If it was possible, we would take their suffering. Why do we feel their suffering as our own? It is love. Love binds us and connect us with one another. Love breaks the dividing walls between us so we can feel other's pain as our own. In other words, we become one as we love. To be one body of Christ, we need love. With love in Christ and love for each other, we can become one body of Christ and build up this church together.

### **Unity in the Body of Christ**

I heard that Asbury UMC had a difficult time with one of your past pastors who was Korean. I assume that some of you may have been frustrated or even angry at the Conference when you first heard that your new pastor would be a Korean again. If that is the case, I can promise you one thing. I am here to love you. I will love you as much as I can. I will laugh with you and mourn with you. I will pray with you and work with you to grow the church together. So please "Don't judge a book by its cover" and do not reduce who I am to my ethnicity. In fact, we

all are God's beloved children. We are different but we are God's children and we are called to help each other, to mature in faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, with gifts we have received from Christ. We are called to be one in Christ and continue to grow in Christ together.

My teacher of preaching at Emory University said, "Pastors are not "made" in seminaries. Seminaries train pastors; but pastors are made in and through the church." (Tom Long) I strongly agree with him and I know it from experience. I have learned many strange theological concepts, church history, methods of biblical exegesis and preaching methods in seminaries. But as a pastor, I have been shaped by people whom I've met in churches. It comes from their sincere prayers for me, gentle words of encouragement, wise guidance and timely advice that comes from their own profound experience with God, and most all, deep love for their pastor in Christ. I have grown and become a pastor in and through the church.

I expect the same thing here at Asbury UMC. I humbly request that you pray for me, teach me, and work with me so I can continue to grow in Spirit and mature "to the measure of the full stature of Christ." As a pastor, I will do my best to build up this beautiful church and share the gifts that I have received from God with you. So we may become one in Christ and mature in the knowledge of God through this new faith journey together.

Some may still worry whether this Korean pastor can really preach the gospel and lead the church. I can honestly say, "Don't worry." I am a living evidence that cultural differences and language barriers are not problems in sharing the gospel. I am here today not because the bishop has appointed me here (though of course he did) but because of your Methodist ancestors. About a hundred years ago, your Methodist missionaries came to Korea with their passion for Christ and love for Koreans. Of course, they also brought their broken Korean. I reasonably believe that my English is much better than those missionaries' Korean. But because those Methodist missionaries shared the gospel with their broken Korean, my ancestors heard this very gospel and became Christians. And because of them, I am here with you today at Asbury UMC. So if you have any complaints about my appointment, file your complaints to your Methodist ancestors. What I would like to say is that our love in Christ overcomes all dividing walls like culture and language. And that Love in Christ binds us as one body of Christ.

We are about to begin our new faith journey together. The road we are going to take has not been taken before. This will be a huge transition for the church as well as for me. The road we are traveling will not always be well-paved. It will be bumpy at some points. (I know it) However, we can walk this road together. With love in Christ, we will become one family, one body of Christ, and the Holy Spirit will be with us on our journey of transformation. God will be with us and bless our church. Amen.