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## **6 November 2013 - Evening Prayer**

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### **Under the Power of the Holy Spirit (John 4:17-31)**

Sermon by Rev. BANG, Ji Il

“The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth” (John 14:17). “The world cannot accept him ... But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.” (John 14:17) “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” (John 14:26)

Only those who live under the guidance of the Holy Spirit through the work of the Advocate can receive the teaching of the Spirit. It is they who will also learn and know the teaching of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Receiving the Holy Spirit means that we allow ourselves to live entirely under the Spirit’s control. Only under the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit can we receive the teaching of the Spirit and know properly what it is that the Lord wishes to teach us. It is also a promise that the Holy Spirit is the one who enables us to know the deep truth of the Gospel. The work of the Gospel is one of salvation, the saving of lost souls. The Gospel is the good news that proclaims the forgiveness of sins through the sacrificial self-offering of Jesus Christ, the lamb who was slain.

In the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have received the gift of new life. When Jesus was lifted and placed at the right hand of God we received the liberty of entering freely into the presence of God. Before Christ came into the world, in the time of the Old Testament, only the High Priest was allowed into the most sacred place of worship and then only on one day of the year specifically set aside for the purpose of repentance. However, for those who have been saved because of our faith in Jesus Christ, we are now free to enter into God’s holy presence whenever and wherever we desire. This was made possible only because of what the Lord, Immanuel, did for us on the cross.

In working for the glory of God and for the Gospel, we must be careful not to work according to our will or to our plans. The work of the Gospel, the work of salvation was prepared before creation by our God, Jehovah Jireh, the Lord who provides. Even now, the power and work of the Gospel is proof of God’s hand at work in our lives. It is the work of the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, who enables us to receive this gift of salvation that is provided for us by our God with joy and humility. The gift of salvation that we have received is not the result of our intellectual pursuit or our own perceptions of wisdom. Rather, it is the result of having received the good news of God’s gospel of salvation by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is this power of the Holy Spirit that has brought salvation to us. I believe that it is this power of the

Holy Spirit who has guided us in selecting today's passage for our reflection and spiritual edification. Therefore, we stand before God in gratitude and humility.

The one remaining promise that we are waiting for is the return of our Lord. We do not know when the Lord will return. A hymn that is sung by the Koreans says, "We know not when the Lord will return, either day or night." However, we do know one thing that is certain. "I know that the Lord who knows my situation, and in whom I believe and rely upon, will always be beside me." This Gospel, this good news is what the power of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, enables us to know, believe and trust in as God's gift.

In recent years, there have been many religious cultural performances conducted by the churches. Because it is a cultural performance or event there is not much of the Gospel that is presented. This cannot be called a proclamation of the Gospel. When we, as the people saved in Christ by God's grace place the Gospel at the heart of our individual lives, as well as the foundation of all our gatherings as Christ's Church, we can enjoy and experience the blessings of the power of the Gospel, the power of the Holy Spirit at work in our midst.

I believe that this 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the WCC will be a gathering that clearly reveals the power of the Gospel under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord, Jesus Christ, became human and came into our midst to give us true peace. This self-emptying gift of incarnation is a greater proclamation of God's love and grace, even greater than that of creation itself. This work of salvation is the work of our Lord. As this global gathering of Christians from all around the world is taking place in Korea, I am both excited and shaking with anticipation. I believe that this assembly will be a gathering which strengthens and enhances the glorious light of peace and reconciliation through the powerful proclamation of God's good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.

### Justice Rising

by Rev. Dr Jennifer Leath

*Am I a Christian?* How could I be in a world where Christian identity is under the authority of "the ruler of this world"? *Am I a Christian?* How could I be in a world where Christians own multinational corporations that have commodified water, air, and land, and sell genetically modified seeds that cannot naturally reproduce to ensure a longer lasting profit and power over starving bodies? *Am I a Christian?* How could I be in a world where Christians increasingly justify the exclusion, bullying, torture, imprisonment, enslavement, lynching, and murder of people whose skin is too dark, whose gender is too female, whose sexuality is too queer, whose region is too poor, whose language is too foreign, whose knowledge is too experiential, whose blindness is too inconvenient, whose HIV status is too positive, whose wheelchair is too obtrusive . . . and, yes, those whose "G\*d" we do not know? *Am I a Christian?* Are you? Do these words scandalize you? Thankfully, I have one thing going for me: *Jesus* didn't call himself a Christian. ☺ In fact, according to our inherited accounts, Jesus doesn't seem much concerned with religious identity politics at all – often silencing those who identify him as the Messiah and not making a big deal about his

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<sup>1</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza explains her use of the notion "G\*d" in reference to the divine source. She writes: "In order to indicate the brokenness and inadequacy of human language to name the Divine, I switched in my book *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet; Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 1994) from the Orthodox Jewish writing of *G-d*, which I had adopted in *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon, 1992) and *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesia-logy of Liberation* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), to the spelling *G\*d*, which seeks to avoid the conservative malestream association that the writing of *G-d* has for some Jewish feminists. Consequently, I have begun to write also *the\*logy*, which literally means "speaking of G\*d," in the same way in order to indicate that I speak about G\*d neither in masculine (*theology*) nor in feminine (*thealogy*) gender terms." I have adopted this denotation for divinity sharing in this rationale. Schüssler Fiorenza, "Feminist Studies in Religion and The\*logy."

Hebrew heritage. So, tonight: I refuse the shackles of traditional nomenclature for the hope of an eternal justice – a justice rising through discipleship reconsidered.

I *am* a disciple of Jesus Christ: a follower of the way, the truth, and the life. As a disciple, *what* I do makes me *who* I am. The very foundation of this discipleship is not only expressed in the dynamism and movement implicit in the act of *following* another's lead, but is also expressed in the *particular* dynamism and movement evoked in the act of following one who is moving. In other words, this discipleship of Jesus is not reflected in the basic capacity to imitate a parked car, but in the more sophisticated capacity to follow the lead of a moving car. Yet, this evening's passage reminds us that the vehicle Jesus drives is even *more* complex than that: it "goes away from" us and "comes to" us in the same breath. It is in this strange simultaneity of "going" and "coming" that our true discipleship is tested.

And *this* "coming" and "going" is the fundamental problem of this evening's pericope. The Gospel According to John records Jesus in transition – especially in verse 28. Here, Jesus seems to be preparing himself and his disciples for his going and coming. The danger of this moment for those who would be disciples of Jesus is that things *often* get lost in transition. Surely, we who have been learning BEXCO over the past several days can attest to the risk of getting lost in the transitional processes of coming and going. In fact, it has been said of some that they "don't know whether they are coming or going" – and this is never a compliment. Yet, Jesus is aware and is making his disciples aware of the fact that his going and coming are connected – and that this is all part of a divine plan. Perhaps Jesus encouraged himself and his followers: "Sina pingamizi yote ni mipango ya Mungu."<sup>2</sup> How do we, as disciples of Jesus, connect to his going and coming without getting lost in the transition?

Truthfully, *I* got lost in transition with this text. I could not see what this text had to do with justice. I could only see the flash of Jesus's "going" and "coming." Yet, justice rises in verse 30 as Jesus declares with regard to "the ruler of this world": "He has no power over me." Surely, John Wesley Work III was reminded of this affirmation when he wrote that modern spiritual: "Ride on, King Jesus! No man can hinder him!" There is no power that can prevail over Jesus. And *we* can live in this promise of justice too – that is freedom from nooses around our necks, shackles on our feet, and chains on our souls, freedom to do the works that Jesus did – and even greater – to G\*d's glory.<sup>3</sup> Ain't *that* good news?

At their core, so many of the crises in our world are manifestations of power struggles: macro-aggressive and micro-aggressive assertions of dominance over sentient life (animal and plant bodies) and resources (natural and fabricated). Rather than succumb to "the ruler of this world," yielding to the fallacy that peace is won through conquest and conceding that "might" makes "right" – the least among us, the marginalized, the abominations and untouchables, the deviants and impure, the broken and lost resist the crushing force of those who do not need a doctor.<sup>4</sup> Our *resistance* is our faith in action. Our modern ancestral saints inspire us. And we unflinchingly believe: "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."<sup>5</sup> We unequivocally maintain: "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."<sup>6</sup> We will give our lives to affirm: "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."<sup>7</sup> Some see us dare to live – and call us murderers. Yet – with every breath we inhale for our survival, with every breath we exhale for our thriving in sacred balance with all of creation – we defy death itself. Our persistent, eternal *existence* is our resistance; this is our faith in action. And so, Jesus bids us to "rise" and "be on our way" overcoming any powers of this world that would dare to assert power *over* us – or others.

**How does justice arise within us?** Justice rises through gifts that Jesus leaves with us as byproducts of his transition. Yes, Jesus gives us a peace that is not won through domination power over others. However,

<sup>2</sup> "I have no doubts, for all is in G\*d's plan."

<sup>3</sup> Kee, *The Cambridge Annotated Study Bible*, John 14.12.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Mark 2.17, Luke 5.31, Matthew 9.12.

<sup>5</sup> King, "Letter from Birmingham City Jail (1963)," 290.

<sup>6</sup> Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House"; Kee, *The Cambridge Annotated Study Bible*, Proverbs 3.31.

<sup>7</sup> King, "Our God Is Marching On! Montgomery Alabama Speech (1965)."

this is not all! We receive in abundance! As Jesus passes with the beautiful surety of a slug, he leaves an anointing of fearlessness, freedom from worry, assurance, foreknowledge for the sake of faith, accompaniment, and the capacity of divine love that exists between Parent and Child, G\*d Our Creator and Jesus, who exceeded the WCC parameters of “youth” by only three years. Jesus is not stingy with us: he does not offer just *peace*, but *just* peace. Justice rising within us calls for us to be so generous as well.

**How does justice arise within us?** Justice rises through a return to and remembrance of the source of all life. Not only did Jesus return to *his* source in G\*d Our Creator, but Jesus also bids us return to *our* common source in G\*d Our Creator. The inspired writer of Romans reminds us of the ways that G\*d is like the root of a most ancient olive tree.<sup>8</sup> Though we may debate breaking off and grafting in, this is sure: water runs from the root source through every branch that evolves from the germinated seed, pressing its way from the most saturated base to the least concentrated tips. As Jesus acknowledges his source – the root, he reminds us – his branches – of the wisdom George Fox so eloquently stated when he wrote that there is “that of God in everyone.”<sup>9</sup> So, Jesus affirms through the Gospel: “[i]n a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.”<sup>10</sup>

**How does justice arise within us?** Justice rises through our rejoicing, empowered by love. Often, the most vulnerable parts of the tree are those, like us, who live at the extremities, the newest additions to the tree of life. Our vulnerability may tempt us to desperation and fear, but love – faithfully expressed through one who survived the middle passages of earth-walking, death-defying, and universe-revealing – calls us to rejoice! Yes, “Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say, ‘Rejoice!’”<sup>11</sup> Rejoice because *love* calls forth justice!

### Receive, Re-Source, Rejoice! Now . . .

Rise, ancestors and descendants of justice: let us be on our way! We are Justice Rising!

Rise, mothers and fathers of justice: let us be on our way! We are Justice Rising!

Rise, sisters and brothers of justice: let us be on our way! We are Justice Rising!

Rise, daughters and sons of justice: let us be on our way! We are Justice Rising!

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<sup>8</sup> Kee, *The Cambridge Annotated Study Bible*, Romans 11.

<sup>9</sup> Fox, *Works of George Fox*.

<sup>10</sup> Kee, *The Cambridge Annotated Study Bible*, 19–20.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Philippians 4.4.