

Bringing Peace to the Korean Peninsula

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Brian Wren, in the brilliant and hopeful hymn, “This Is a Day of New Beginnings,” writes “This is a day of new beginnings, time to remember and move on, time to believe what love is bringing, laying to rest the pain that’s gone.”

Could this be a prophetic word, coming to life in what is happening between North and South Korea, and the larger global community? Could this articulate the vision for what God is doing within a country too long torn apart, divided, and suffering?

Just this year we have seen progress some believed impossible just months ago. In April, President Moon Jae-In of the Republic of Korea (South) and Chairman Kim Jong-Un of the State Affairs Commission of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North) made history, coming together to create the Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula. Words cannot adequately express the magnitude of these monumental steps forward. Our faith language does include a concept that is apt in this instance: miracle.

This initial meeting was followed by another historic summit in Singapore, where Chairman Kim Jong-Un met with U.S. President Donald Trump to affirm the foundation laid in the Panmunjom Declaration and to establish a new relationship between the United States of the whole Korean Peninsula.

Some skeptics and critics were harsh in their assessments of what was said and left unsaid, but most people saw an incredible witness for healing, peace, and a new positive spirit between former enemies.

In the face of such monumental changes and decisions, we remain hopeful. In so many powerful ways we have been granted a vision of a Promised Land. While it may not merit comparison with “a new heaven and a new earth,” it is most certainly evidence of the transformative power of forgiveness, grace, compassion,

mercy, and a commitment to justice – many of the qualities of the very realm of God.

It is incumbent on our ecumenical Christian communities worldwide to hold this process of reconciliation and peace in our prayers. I feel great joy and hopefulness as our World Methodist Council, our Korean Methodist Church, and our United Methodist Church unite in this crucial work.

I also celebrate the leadership and membership of our World Council of Churches, The National Council of Churches in Korea, World Communion of Reformed Churches, and the various ecumenical groups and peace workers in Korea and the United States who are joining together to help make this dream a reality.

At the same time, I am not without concern.

The reunification, reconciliation and restoration of Korea, North and South, is about much more than provincial or global politics. While we value and regard the support that President Trump and the United States provide through this process, it is a process that must be owned and guided by the Koreans.

Korea cannot be viewed as a strategic “chess piece” in a game of global politics. It is a nation with a great heritage, history, and an amazing potential future. Too much intervention could result in interference that could undermine the best efforts of the leaders in North and South Korea.

Our gospel reports that Jesus blessed the “peace makers.”

Many hands and hearts and minds are needed to create peace, but there are three distinctive skill and knowledge sets that make for peace: peace makers, peace builders, and peace keepers. Too often, peace keepers in our world resort to violence and manipulation to force peace; to create the pretense of peace. At its best, peace keeping is about respectful negotiation, compassionate collaboration, and integrated processes of mutual benefit.

Peace building is also crucial in that peace does not seem to happen naturally in human kind. Selfishness, greed, lust for power, need to control, and disregard for

human rights emerge in every age and place and culture. The work to counter such destructive forces is ongoing and never ending.

But both peace building and peace keeping must first be based upon a firm, solid, and lasting foundation. “Blessed are the peace makers, for they shall be called the daughters and sons of God!” (Matt. 5:9)

To do the hard work – to clear the debris of decades of animosity and violence, to level the soil of discontent, division and hatred, and to set a sound foundation upon which to build and maintain is sensitive, fragile, exacting and delicate work.

May we pray that those involved in Korea’s peace process don’t play politics, but respect the vulnerable nature of the work and strive with integrity to protect and preserve at every step.

On the one hand, this is about Korea – and as such Korea must be respected to “work out its own salvation with fear and trembling.” (Phil. 2:12)

On the other hand, in our global community and the family of humankind, when “one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.” (I Cor. 12:26)

This is not an “us/them” issue, but truly an “all of us together” moment in history. Our whole world has been impacted by a Korean war too long unresolved and unended.

This Round Table has been a significant forum to envision a way forward. It responds to an unspoken but understood mandate to be involved and engaged in producing the fruit of the Spirit in our world.

As a Christian witness, we offer peace and patience, kindness and love, generosity and faithfulness and self-control that generates gentleness and joy. Our faith provides illumination to the fact that God’s ways are not our ways, and that together we can rise above our baser natures to be the body of Christ for the world.

Brothers and sisters, a forced peace is not a true peace. UN sanctions and embargoes are not helpful in the current climate. Threats, overt or sublime, to attain denuclearization will not bring us what we need. Good, sound, just leadership on all sides is needed.

May our U.S. involvement model the best diplomacy, cooperation, and servant leadership.

May our faith communions join in heart, mind, soul and spirit to bring God's blessing to this incredible moment in time.

May we hold fast to the faith that will bring healing, wholeness, and closure to a division too long tolerated and accepted.

May we invoke God's promise to Jeremiah for our kindred in Korea – "For surely I know the plans I have for you; says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope." (Jer. 29:11)

Thanks be to God.