

Sermon Outline - Sun, May 1, 2022 – Minjung Theology

For the past several months we have been leaning into a conversation about economic justice and its centrality to the Christian tradition going back to Biblical times. In January we looked at the life and work of John the Baptist who was deeply connected to Jewish economic justice movement in New Testament times. In February we looked at Black traditions of economic justice and a re-thinking of the societal structures which govern how we live and share with each other.

We are also in the season of Eastertide. It is the 50 day long period between Easter Sunday and Pentecost Sunday in which Christians are called to celebrate the miracle of Easter. The central idea of Eastertide is that one Sunday is not enough. We spend 40 days of Lent leading up to Easter in contemplative practice that begins with Ash Wednesday. In Ash Wednesday we are reminded that we come from the dust of the Earth and that our time on Earth is short when we measure it against the longevity of God and this universe in which we dwell. Lent is a time where we lean into the sorrow leading up to Easter and in Eastertide we lean into the celebration.

This month is also Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage month and we take this opportunity to recognize the contribution of Asian theologians and movements. While Christianity is on life support in Europe and while fewer and fewer Americans are adherents to Christianity - the tradition is growing in Asia where there are vibrant conversations about theology and practice. As a Black Christian I am well familiar with the conversations about how to worship within a spiritual tradition that came to most of my people through the sin of slavery. As I prepared for this month I have been thankful to lean into conversations by Asian theologians about how to draw near to a Christ who was introduced to most Asian communities through the interventions of missionaries who were tied to colonial powers who

As we continue to explore what God is saying to this community centered in Dorchester but sprouting in a number of places throughout this country, there is so much to learn from other movements which have struggled with questions similar to the ones we are asking. In particular as we are emerging from the most challenging days of this pandemic and wrestling with the climate crisis. As we walk with a clear belief that we can and must do better than we are now. As we yearn for Jubilee not just as a far off ideal but a real calling to practice something radically different in our lives – it is important to draw upon the wisdom of those who have gone before us.

Today I want to look at our scripture from the perspective of Minjung theology of South Korea. I want to be clear that having read a few key articles of this theological tradition by no means makes me an expert. Furthermore it is a central tenant of Minjung that it is theology deeply rooted in the South Korean context. Today's sermon is not an attempt to declare ourselves adherents of this theology but to recognize that this theme of economic justice is one that God has been speaking since the beginning of time and one that followers of Christ have leaned into

across the world. While we cannot fully understand this theological tradition from outside of South Korea, we can still see the Holy Spirit moving, speaking and illuminating truth to people in every context. We can observe where the threads tied together movements in Selma, Alabama; Sao Paulo, Brazil; and Seoul, Korea.

- Minjung is most directly translated “the multitudes or the masses.”
- Not about a bunch of individual people, but it acknowledges that something else happens when we come together.
- Minjung reminds of the term “a gente” in Portugues.
- It challenges Korean people, and particularly the poor and oppressed in that society to see their salvation not simply as an individual decision but a collective liberation
- It rejects Western/ American notions of individuality to assert that God cares about the collective we.
- The theology foundations were formed in the 1950s and 1960s as theologians around the world were grappling with the reality of World War II and the growing tensions in a world dominated by colonialism. We often talk about white colonialism because it was the most dominant, but in the case of Korea, much of the conversation is also about Japanese colonialism.
- It became popular in the 1970s during the dictatorship of Park Chung-hee as Korean Christians tried to figure out how to worship a liberatory in the midst of oppression not by an outside oppressor but their own people.
- In 1972 Ahn Buyng-mu considered one of the founding voices in Minjung theology published an article called “Jesus and Minjung” which is considered the first major text to articulate the theology.

My invitation today is for us to read the Beatitudes from a Minjung perspective not as a text about one individual or disconnected peoples but as a group of people connected by their oppression and collectively moving towards liberation.

When Jesus^[a] saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵ “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

⁷ “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

⁸ “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

⁹“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely^[b] on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Key Points –

1. The salvation that Jesus brings is not fully fulfilled if it is individualistic. Its true power is in the promise to the collective.
2. Jesus’ goal is to change the situations of suffering and to bring them relief and liberation.
3. For those who have the personal privilege to not experience suffering, the calling is to make family with those who are suffering and be counted amongst that number.

As we think about what we are called to as Christians and as a congregation we have so much to learn from this theological tradition that calls us to really think about how we are concretely in solidarity with those who Jesus loves and prioritizes. I was particularly struck by how Minjung theologians in the context of South Korea being a relatively prosperous nation now were looking towards North Korea and asking how to turn their faith to be in solidarity with their brothers and sisters to the North. We are in different places within New Roots. We have different levels of privilege, but no matter where we are we all have some ability to think about how to shift our practice from being about our personal salvation to more a focus on collective liberation.

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1. When you re-read the scripture with the collective you or they, how do the words sit with you? Is it too foreign an idea to make sense? Are there new ways of understanding that open up to you?
 2. Have you ever experienced God’s liberation not just for you but with a group of people? How can you look into your family or ancestry to see God’s hand at work across a group rather than just an individual?
 3. When you look at your life, your family, your circle – are you mostly in relationship with people of similar privilege as you or do you see a range of socio-political status among the people you are closest to? If so, how can you grow those relationships, if not how do you feel called to shift? What are concrete steps you might take in this Eastertide season?