

Walking hand in hand with many cultures - by Rev. Jae Young Rhee

[John 17:20] "I ask, not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, [21] that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us,"

“Hallelujah~!” This is gentle Korean way of saying Hal-lal-ujah! (Greetings from my dear wife Sarah who always asks me to make a bright smile when I stand before wonderful people.)

My first name Jae Young in Chinese character means ‘carrying of an hero’ that defines my identity as a donkey who enters into New Jerusalem carrying Jesus on the back. Sometimes He blesses me by opening my mouth as he opened the mouth of the donkey to save the life of its master, when the false prophet Balaam’s spiritual eyes were blinded.

I’m the Senior Pastor of Ghent Christian Church (DOC) in Akron, Ohio, and the moderator-elect of NAPAD, the community of rich cultural diversity, which boasts of over 14 ethnic groups, speaking 18 different languages. Ghent Christian Church was established in 1843 and was transformed to a multicultural church in 2005, as a few Korean people joined to this historical Anglo congregation.

Since I was called to this church five and a half years ago from Canada, my ministry focus has always been on the reconciliation among the congregation members, by

spiritual transformation to one new person in the Holy Spirit, so that they may reach to the true unity in Jesus Christ. The Gracious God blessed us by granting the fruit of unity in cultural diversity that we celebrate now, after long journey of overcoming all the dividing walls of misunderstandings and spirit of animosity. Sometimes, to gain their trust, I had to identify myself as a neutral Canadian between the suspicious eyes of the Americans and Koreans.

As ONE congregation, we do everything together; worship, bible study, meetings, outreach, and fellowship. If necessary, we offer translation to another language. We sing together, but each person sings in own language, even in the choir. We really enjoy the healing experience of reconciliation and oneness with cultural richness. However, we still keep pressing on further toward **the true sense of unity**, beyond convenience unity, through spiritual restoration of God's glorious image by denying ourselves.

Today, as we celebrate the election of the new General Minister and President, I'd like to take this opportunity to meditate on the true meaning of unity based on John17:21, which clearly indicates what kind of unity Jesus had in his mind for all believers. He implies that, if we are in this true unity, then we can also be one in the Father and in him.

What would be the nature of this unity? In the next verses, Jesus explains, *"The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, [23] I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one."* This is the **perfect divine sense of unity** that God eagerly desires to restore for His children through the Holy Spirit, since unity is in the very DNA of the Triune God. But, to have the complete oneness among us, we must restore the glory that Jesus has given us so that, *"when he appears, we shall be like him"* as stated in [1John3:2].

What kind of Glory? It was revealed by His self-sacrificial Love and nonjudgmental Righteousness, which transcend any kind of hospitality and social justice of humankind who cannot restore this glory by own work of self-centered love and righteousness, because of our sinful nature. Sin separates us from our loving Father, who loves us, the sinners. That's why Jesus had to come to this world to destroy the work of the devil by His sacrificial love on the cross, identifying Himself with the sinners. Now the resurrected Jesus dwells in us through his Spirit. With his divine glory, he can restore the glory in us if we let Him reign by denying ourselves. He will empower us to live by heavenly culture that transcends any culture that we may belong to.

Dear Brothers and sisters!

Let us joyfully celebrate the unity now, as we walk hand

in hand with many cultures. However, worldly unity cannot last, because it is anchored on the changing worldly culture. But as Peter says in [1Pet1:23], we have been born again by the imperishable seed through the living and enduring Word of the Lord that stands forever. Let us fix our eyes on the Holy Triune God who is eagerly waiting for the union with His beloved lost children. The true unity among us can be achieved **ONLY** when we are in eternal unity with the Triune God, by purifying ourselves just as God is pure.

In John 8, Jesus said to the poor woman caught in adultery. *"Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin."* This hopeless woman could restore unity with Jesus upon repentance, but the self-righteous Pharisees couldn't. Likewise, in Luke 15, the prodigal son came back to the unity with the Father upon repentance, but the self-righteous older son couldn't. Let us love one another with His self-sacrificial and non-judgmental love, because this unfailing true love is the righteousness. Let's continue preparing for our white linen robe to celebrate the true eternal glorious divine unity with Jesus, our Bridegroom. With the restored glory in us, we will fulfill the complete oneness among us, overcoming any barriers that may arise from cultural differences in this world.

Thank you! Praise the Lord!