

“The Great Commission”

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Online Worship Service

Recorded at New Hope UC and York Pines UC

New Hope UC, King City UC, & York Pines UC

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Prayer for Illumination

God of life, your Spirit raised Jesus from dead. Your Spirit inspired the prophets and writers of Scripture. Your Spirit draws us to Christ and helps us to acknowledge him as Lord. We ask that you will send your Spirit now to give us deeper insight, encouragement, faith, and hope through the proclamation of the Easter gospel. Amen.

Scripture Readings:

Matthew 28:16-20

The Gospel reading today titled “The Great Commission” describes where Jesus gives final words before his ascension to heaven to his twelve disciples.

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Acts 2:1-6

The reading of the New Testament today is from Acts 2:1-6. This pericope shows the first work of the Holy Spirit in the early church in Jerusalem.

¹ When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem.

⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.

Good morning. When I visited Seoul, South Korea last year, I had a chance to visit the office of the General Council of the Presbyterian Church of the Republic of Korea, aka PROK. When I talked to one of my minister friends, my eyes caught a tall guy. I remembered him when I used to study at Immanuel College Library. His name is John and he also recalled me. I learned that he was working at the office as a staff sent by the UCC. Since then we have exchanged news from each other. And when I heard that he came to Canada, I invited him to share his experience and the insights from it. Here, I introduce you Rev. Dr. John Egger.

"A Report from Korea"

by Rev. Dr. John Egger

Hello. 안녕하세요 (An-yong-ha-shim-ni-kka)? My name is John Egger. I work with the United Church of Canada as a mission co-worker. Since September 2018 I have been serving overseas in the General Assembly Office of the PROK – that is, the Presbyterian Church in Korea. Right now I am in Canada on my home assignment. The plan when I arrived at the end of February was to travel to various places around the country speaking to groups and congregations about my work in Korea, but the

Covid19 crisis has thrown these plans into turmoil, so here I am speaking to you today in this video to share with you a little bit about my work in Korea and about the relationship between the United Church of Canada and the PROK.

The first mission personnel from what was then the Presbyterian Church in Canada, and then became the United Church, arrived in Korea in 1898. But even before they arrived, there were a handful of other Canadian missionaries working in Korea. One of them was James Gale, who was sent as a missionary by the YMCA in Toronto in 1888. He worked in Pusan, and then latter in Wonsan in what is now North Korea. Pictured here is the team who worked together in those days to translate the Bible into Korean. James Gale is the one seated on the right.

Another was Oliver Avison, a doctor from Toronto who arrived in 1893 and worked as a medical missionary in Seoul on behalf of the Presbyterian Church USA.

But the one I want to focus on today is Rev. William McKenzie, from Cape Breton, who arrived in Korea in 1893 as an independent missionary supported by his family and local congregation. McKenzie worked in the little village of Sorrai,

about 160 miles north of Seoul. There was already a Christian congregation in Sorrai: Koreans travelling to China had encountered Christianity there and had brought it back with them to the village.

This is the church that the villagers built in Sorrai while McKenzie was working with them. It was probably the first Protestant church building in Korea, built in 1894.

Unfortunately McKenzie died in 1895, only a year and half after his arrival, and the devastated church members wrote a letter to the Presbyterian Church in Canada requesting that they send others to Korea to continue McKenzie's work.

And so it was that the Presbyterian Church in Canada responded to this request in 1898 by sending the three mission co-workers pictured here: Dr. Robert Grierson, Dr. Rufus Foote, and the Rev. Duncan McRae.

The area allotted to the Canadian mission at that time was on the east coast of what is now North Korea, in the area of Wonsan where James Gale was already working, and cities further north: Hamheung, Sungjin, and later Yongjung as far as Manchuria. They established hospitals, churches, and schools. As time went by they were joined by other mission co-workers, both men and women.

In this time of coronavirus I am reminded of the struggles of those early days, and in particular I am thinking of Dr. Kate McMillan, who arrived in 1901, just three years after the others. Dr. McMillan managed the mission hospital at Hamheung, and here she is with the other hospital staff. She is in the back row, centre.

In 1922 there were five Korean nursing students who became seriously ill with typhus, and Kate McMillan and the other staff at the hospital laboured tirelessly to save their lives. In the end, all five survived, but Dr. McMillan herself succumbed and later died.

Her successor was Dr. Florence Murray, who served for forty years in Korea, except for three years when she returned to Canada during the WWII. During this time, she worked at hospitals in Hamheung, Seoul, Pusan, and finally in Wonju, where she was instrumental in establishing the Wonju Christian hospital in 1960.

Just last year I travelled to Wonju to be present at the 60th anniversary of the hospital. The memory of Florence Murray figured prominently at this event. Also honoured was Dr. Margaret Storey, who worked as a nurse and director of the occupational rehabilitation center at the hospital for many years, and she is remembered in particular for her work with children with disabilities and the elderly. Margaret was telling me that she

arrived in 1960, a year before Florence Murray retired, and that she remembers Dr. Murray well. Margaret herself retired in 2012, and still lives in Wonju. Here is a quick clip of her being honoured at the event.

I brought up this story because it shows the continuity of the relationship over the years. The United Church of Canada has had a presence in Korea since 1898, supporting the Korean people through all the turbulence that they have experienced through the decades, for example: colonialism from Japan for many years, World War II, the division of the peninsula into North and South in 1945, the Korean war, military dictatorship in the south, and the struggle for human rights and democracy. Through it all, the United Church of Canada has been in solidarity with the people of Korea, supporting them in their struggles, sharing in their suffering, learning from them how to put faith into practice in the midst of such huge difficulties. This brings me to my own work in the General Assembly Office.

The PROK has a strong history of standing strong for peace and human rights in Korea and elsewhere in the world. The PROK sees itself as an ecumenical church – being in partnership with churches all over the world. One way it expresses this commitment is by receiving mission co-workers like myself from partner churches, but also by sending mission co-workers abroad.

When I last counted, the PROK had approximately 75 mission co-workers working with partners all over the world. Here they are at their homecoming event that I attended last year.

My work in the General Assembly Office is officially to help with English language communications, but when I really think about it, at the heart of my work is relationship building. I want to illustrate this with a few images, starting with this one. Here I am with my colleagues in the department Partnership and of Ecumenical Relations in the General Assembly Office of the PROK.

Here I am greeting the children at Hanshin Presbyterian Church in Seoul, during their English language worship service.

Here I am deep in discussion with participants at a youth empowerment conference hosted by the PROK for young people from partner churches in North-East Asia.

And here I am just this past February, being introduced along with two of my colleagues from the General Assembly Office, to the congregation at Haenam, at the very southern tip of Korea. And finally I want to share a clip of a candlelight prayer service for peace that I attended in November.

If I were to try to put my finger on why the United Church continues to make its partnership with the PROK a priority, I would start with the division of the peninsula in 1945. Everything that has unfolded in Korea over the past 75 years—the Korean

war, abuse of human rights, military dictatorship—all stem from this event, which was not the result of anything the Korean people did, but of the outside powers being unable to resolve their own issues.

Moreover, the Korean War has never officially ended. Even though there has been a cease-fire, there was no peace treaty, and the Korean peninsula remains one of the most militarized areas on the planet. This is an issue that the whole world needs to address. It needs both North and South Korea to be partners in working toward a solution, but the rest of the world needs to be involved as well. And so I want to take this opportunity to invite you just simply to pray for peace on the Korean peninsula. This is something that the Korean church has asked us to do: pray for peace in Korea in this year, the 75 anniversary of the division and the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of the Korean war. So please join me in this prayer: We pray, peace now, end the war!

들어 주셔서 고맙습니다 (Deoro ju-shieo-seo ko-map-seup-ni-da.

Thank you for listening.)

Thank you Rev. Egger. I hope his works and contribution accelerate the strong relationship between the PROK and the UCC.

The Gospel reading and the New Testament are about the scenes of the gathering before the ascension of Jesus Christ and of the descent of the Holy Spirit. The two scenes don't seem to have any common ground; however, once we look into it, these are somewhat subsequent motions, actions, and meanings.

In the passage from Mark chapter 28, Jesus and his disciples gathered on a mountain in Galilee. There, Jesus requested the disciples the mission: "Go and make disciples of all nations." Not just sending them to the Jews but to all nations all over the world.

After the great mission, Jesus ascended to heaven at some point. Disciples witnessed Jesus' ascension, and the number of the disciples at the scene was 500 hundred.

Since they eye-witnessed Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, they were convinced in their faith and became dedicative disciples. After the 50th day from Jesus' resurrection, the Holy Spirit came to the disciples. They unconsciously prayed with tongues. It sounded like other languages and that was the incident that revealed the work of the Holy Spirit towards all nations that speak "other" languages.

As Rev. Egger reported, the United Church of Canada sent missionaries to Korea in the later 19th century. The missionaries are your grandparents' or great grandparents' generations. At their young ages with insufficient knowledge about Korea, their acts of missions in the first stages seemed sometimes inefficient

and most of the time inappropriate. However, the Holy Spirit pushed them to disseminate the seeds of the Gospel. From their compassionate and faithful dedication to the “unknown” land, Christianity has sprung, exerted influence upon North Eastern Asia, and has become strong and fruitful. Christianity in North Eastern Asia has become the abundant source of love, peace, and justice in individual and social levels. And now, throughout the world Christianity is sharing these fruits in the 21st century.

Brothers and sisters, if we see only this Sunday, this hard time, and this year, the suffering and hardship that we are facing would be unbearable. And yet, when we look back and learn from our past, and when we foresee the works of the Holy Spirit, we can bear the hope that God has given us.

Therefore, trust our Lord and celebrate the works of the Holy Spirit throughout the Christian history that we are contributing.

Now I gently invite you to close your eyes. Let us have a silent moment to imagine the hardships of the early missionaries and their families, and give thanks to God for the triumphant works of the Holy Spirit within us.