

Keep Hope, Love & Compassion Alive in Us

A Reflection for Trinity Sunday, June 12th, 2022

Rev. Dr. Alan Lai

+ Peace be with you! This Sunday is complex! Let me unpack it for you one by one.

As we gather today, the Pacific Mountain Region is concluding its annual gathering in Prince George. It was started on Thursday afternoon. This year, the theme of the gathering is 'Rooted and Grounded in Love.' They invited a Chinese American Jeff Chu to be their keynote speaker. Many of us may not know who Jeff Chu is, but he is a popular Christian broadcaster among a younger generation of Christians, especially among the LBGQT communities. He is a preacher, reporter, has his own podcast, and is a book writer. Jeff has given this gathering courageous messages in ways that are honest, open, authentic, and not your typical preacher type. If you had listened to his messages, he employed so many Chinese dishes and cooking as metaphors that you may think that he is having a cooking channel! I find it affirming the church invited an outsider of our community to inspire us to think of the Christian faith.

As I have talked about it last Sunday, going outside of our comfort zone can be life-giving and refreshing. Since we are so familiar with a particular form of ministry, what we are doing may not inspire us anymore. Thinking and doing things outside the box is theologically correct and intellectually embraced, but sometimes it gets reduced to mean nothing but a cliché. It happens too often. And yet, it is through going outside of the comfort zone, outside of the familiar places and faces, outside the box, that we will find new meaning and experiences in chaotic times such as now. I know it sounds like a good theory, which not many of us find that inviting. We may even be tired of this idea because the church has said something similar over many years. And then nothing "outside the box" is happening. But yet, it is still true, the world is big. Our boxes are super small.

This weekend is also the United Church of Canada 97th anniversary! Happy birthday! What is even more exciting to celebrate on our anniversary is that on June 10th, 2022,

Friday, Emmanuel College, one of our seminaries in Toronto, announced The Rev. Dr. HyeRan Kim-Cragg to be their new Principal. Dr. Kim-Cragg is a good friend of mine, but I take no credit in this selection. Dr. Kim-Cragg graduated from Emmanuel College in the same academic as mine; that is religious education. Formerly, she taught at St. Andrews College, one of the United Church seminaries in Saskatoon. Since 2019, she has been teaching intercultural preaching at Emmanuel College. Originally coming from Korea, my friend Dr. Kim-Cragg rises to the occasion and becomes the new Principal of Emmanuel College. Another colleague of mine reminds me that Dr. Kim-Cragg is the second female professor to become Principal within the Toronto School of Theology system; certainly, she is the first Korean-Canadian, a Person of Colour to lead in this role. I am super delighted to witness this is happening.

The United Church isn't perfect, but we are constantly adjusting, learning, and critiquing ourselves. 97 years is a long time. Ever since June 10th, 1925, when the United Church of Canada was formed, a lot has happened and changed. Much has changed because the world has changed. We change because we want to be faithful not to the creeds and original theological understanding, but to God's beloved world that has changed a great deal. To be responsible partners with God in this world, it demands the church to be flexible, adaptive, and examine their passion for mission. This year, the United Church actively addresses the racism happening not only in the world, but also within the church. The 40-Days of Anti-Racism campaign is being developed to invite thought and action. In the fall, it will happen again.

Today is Trinity Sunday, a Christian festival to remind Christians the triune nature of the God we call Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. It is totally a Christian formulation to describe our understanding of the divine. It is a mystery, but at the same time, it is Christianity's contribution to the religious world. In this triune God understanding, we reflect on the harmonious relationship among the Creator, Redeemer, and the Sustainer. In this understanding, the church says there is a certain close relationship in perfect synchronization to the one we called God. It is a mystery still, but this Triune God invites us to journey with mystery and to fall in love again with the beauty of the

earth and its inhabitants. Trinity is a mysterious theological concept. We will not be able to solve it in our lifetime. But out of the idea of a Triune God, comes the relational aspect of the divine. This Creator whom we called God values and treasures relationship. Solid relationships. Working relationships. Good, humble. and life-affirming relationships. That should inspire us to work on our relationships with one another, with strangers, diverse people of the world, and the earth when we worship this God.

On this special occasion we also bring to our attention the discoveries of 215 bodies of Indigenous children in Kamloops a year ago. Of course, many more had been found. A year has gone by, and just like any other news and events, it easily got forgotten in the news media. But not in our minds and hearts. We cannot afford to do this if we are sincere in rebuilding strong relationships with one another. No matter how much work this church body has done, it is always necessary to continue to uphold this work of reconciliation.

What Christians can do is pay respect to the continual unfolding of God's mystery. Christian mission today cannot bypass self-critique and unlearning, and the proclamation of the gospel should include making spaces for others; those who sing different songs, hear different music, and tell different stories. The God Christians worship treasures the plurality of human existence and experience. Embracing diversity isn't a slogan, an idea, or past concept. But emerges from a deeply held and aptly humble worship of a God who values healthy and strong relationships with everything. We need one another. Everything, everyone is interconnected with everything else.

“O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” We are here to testify and to bring everything together to witness the majestic nature of God's world.

The church that you and I are part of has changed and continues to change. We change for the love of God, we change for the love of God's creation, we change for the love of the beauty of the earth. The United Church of Canada isn't interested in watering down biblical teachings, disregarding the authority of the Bible, or the wisdom of the saints in

the past. Quite the opposite; this church body seeks to honour the ongoing unfolding of God's mystery of radical hospitality through engaging in the needed self-critique of wrongdoing and wrong assumptions. We still have work to do. We have new work to do. We have to imagine new and faithful ways that reflect the context of our time.

A day such as today calls on all of us to be humble, reflective, and courageous. As Christians, we learn to discern the intertwining nature of the former ways of knowing and the demands of the contemporary context. To untangle the thread and to envision faith anew, for the love of God, seriously, keep the education of ourselves alive. That's how we celebrate, today and every day. Let's keep hope, love, and compassion alive in us!

May the risen Christ have mercy on us. Amen.