

## **Transitioning from Chaos to Health**

A Reflection for 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Easter, Yr. C. May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022 (John 5:1-9)

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+ Peace be with you!

I am happy to be back in Vancouver! As some of you know, I was stranded at LaGuardia airport with my colleague due to bad weather. We were sitting on the plane for over 3 hours, and finally decided not to fly. Thankfully, my colleague is a staff at the UCC General Church office. He quickly connected with the office staff and our travel agency in Toronto. The short story is that we returned to the same hotel we left in the morning and flew the next day. It really was an anxious adventure, and very tiring.

The reason why we were in New York was to attend a conference called Churches Witnessing with Migrants 11<sup>th</sup> International Consultation. It is a faith-based organization doing fantastic work with, and for, migrants. One particular merit of this group is that they are being recognized by the corresponding UN committee on migrants. They are welcome to feed ideas and suggestions to the UN. Just after we left, key leaders of this organization and others attended a consultation at the UN's side. They organized this gathering just before the UN so that we have input and updates for them to attend this larger scale consultation.

As I have told you, the lead of this trip is from the General Church Office. His name is Dr. Emo Yango. Another participant that got invited is a native of Zimbabwe now living in Edmonton. She has United Methodist roots and organizes several Zimbabwe communities in the area.

Working with migrants is a new topic for me. I learnt a lot from the presenters about the most up-to-date work, and the challenges facing them. It is about front-line advocacy, fighting for social justice, and offering concrete assistance. The United Church of Canada supports this organization. The reason why we attended this gathering is that we want to participate in whether the idea of creating a North American chapter of this organization is needed. Furthermore, we want to explore how this kind of frontline advocacy work should impact the ministry and mission of our denomination.

Supporting migrants should be one of the key components of church's work. In the Bible, we read that God turned Abram into a migrant by telling him to leave his hometown. Ancient Israelites were searching for their new place to call home after narrowly escaping Egypt. Ruth became a migrant when she travelled with Naomi to a country not her own. Jesus' parents became refugees when they fled Herod's killing plan. And Jesus grew up under the occupation of Rome, and although he was Jewish, he was colonized by the empire's way of life. Migrants' stories are endless in the Bible. Currently, there are about 800 million people worldwide in constant movement, migrating. They are searching for the new place they can call home. Can religious communities help?

The month of May is Asian Heritage Month. And somehow, I haven't done anything special to help us celebrate. But this trip was special because the three of us representing the UCC to this consultation are very diverse in our cultural heritage. Dr. Emo Yango is of Filipino descent, Tazvi is a Zimbabwean, and I am Chinese. In a larger scale, I like it better this way than whenever it is Asian Heritage Month, we do something Asian, and in Black History Month, we do something with Africans. But at all times, we recognize one another's gifts and culture, and doing things together.

One thing I enjoyed hearing about in this conference is the idea of 'Infrastructure of Welcome and Hospitality' and the 'Architecture of Solidarity.' There is no shortage of cognitive acceptance of doing welcoming and hospitality. I as a minister say that a lot. Often, I am just giving the listeners an intellectual idea that they embrace it as the right thing to say, and then believe. But welcoming, hospitality, and solidarity are not just intellectual ideas. In order to live them out, we need infrastructure, and we need to build architecture around them. If we say we welcome certain groups of people, we need to sit down to plan, create, and implement certain actions so that what we say we desire will materialize.

Church, mission, and advocacy came together since Day One of the Christian movement. In ancient times, Apostle Paul heard a call to go to Macedonia, today's

Greece, and he had this character of meeting the needs of people who are unknown to us. In the beginning, it may be just an idea. But then, Paul responded by leaving where he was and went to a territory that was unknown to him. In the Bible, there are so many testimonies about people hearing and responding to God's call. What does it mean in real life? Sometimes, hearing God's call can be mysterious to us normal people. When we narrow it down, this sense of a call can be an inner urge, a desire, a motivation, or action that speaks meaningfully to us. And then we act on it.

One interesting observation about Paul's calling experience was that he had a vision of a man pleading him to come over. But when he actually set foot in Macedonia, his first client was "a certain woman" named Lydia! Surprise! A man may have spoken to him in this vision, but it was a woman who first responded to his message. Be ready for surprises whenever we engage in mission!

In some ways it relates to Christianity's unyielding commitment to help people walk again, live life again, and be strong again; like what we heard in the gospel this morning.

When we read the gospel text this morning, it looked harmless. Jesus was so kind to make a man walk again. Why should people be upset? If you keep reading the story, that's how we know that Jesus was doing it during the Sabbath! Ahh! Sabbath is a major theme in the Bible. It is not about rule and regulation, although it can be treated that way. Sabbath is about restoration, resting, and regeneration. Its essence is to be kind to our bodies, one another, the earth, and the environment.

But then, some people were upset. Don't worry, it happens to us too. We sometimes may be too gun-ho on rules and regulations and forget the reasons behind the essence of those regulations. I am not arguing for flexibility, and bending the rule; but instead, a trip back to unpack the reasons behind why those rules were put in place. To read this text, this is not the time to point fingers to "the Jews;" certainly, not the time to accuse Jews of being self-righteous or law driven. Rather, it is about challenging us, human beings, to be kind to one another, to see behind the rules and regulations, and recognize the need of human communities.

Certainly, both Jews, Muslims, and Christians should be able to agree that the deed of loving-kindness in healing the needy, the paralyzed, and the troubled is God's business; and doing them during Sabbath is not just fine, but holy.

Today is Sabbath. We cannot return to the good old days when no malls, restaurants and shops were opened on Sunday. In those days, Sundays in the city went dead. We are living in a different time. I am just wondering how many of us enjoy Sunday shopping or going for a good meal after church. These are fine. I have done it. But the essence isn't about what not to do on Sunday, but what are we doing to renew our minds and souls on a weekly basis? What are we doing to help people in need? In order to be active in God's call, we need to rest well. Sabbath is just a constant reminder that we cannot go on without adequate rest and renewal. We may do it on Sundays, but also it can be done on any other day and with many other means.

May our lives be filled with God's grace so that when the time comes, we have the energy, motivation, and desire to offer help to others in their transition from chaos to health. Amen.