

Trinity Institute, *The Good News Now – Evolving with the Gospel of Jesus*

Good morning, everybody.

(Chorus of good morning)

How are you this morning? I feel very honored to talk about what is good news about the cross, but, frankly, it is too early for me to talk about cross. For me cross is a symbol of torture, a symbol of execution of a revolutionary. So maybe I will start from what we Asians think about Jesus from our own background.

Let me start with a story. With so much money poured into Asian mission, basically Christian mission toward Asia has failed. Christianity is less than three percent of Asian population. Let me tell you why. Now I wear the hat of a Buddhist Dharma teacher from Korean Zen tradition. I'm an ecofeminist liberation theologian, but at the same time, I'm a Dharma teacher in Buddhist Zen tradition. So we call ourselves a double believer. So today, when I talk about cross, I talk about cross from the perspective of this double believer. According to our tradition, this young man called Jesus, he had very bad karma.

(Laughter)

What did he do in his previous life? What happened to people who have a very good karma? They are born in a very good family, raised in a good place, and get married, have children, and have a very successful career, prosperity, and die among all their siblings in the natural cause of death.

The person with the worse karma, they are born in kind of a conspicuous family, like we do not really know who is Jesus' biological father. Then this young man raised in Galilee, a poor place, like a place of people who are rejected. They call them *Am ha'aretz*, "people who belong to the land." Then this guy even didn't get married, even he didn't have a child. And what happened? He was kidnapped, tortured, and killed at a young age, calling "Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani," and he was killed. Wow. Too bad. I'm so sorry for him. And usually in our tradition we said, "What did he do in his previous life? Why did he have such a bad karma?"

And resurrection, it's not a big deal in Asia, because many yogis in Hinduism and Buddhism, they go into this underworld of death. Actually, their breath is totally stopped. Then they revive themselves, resurrection, and whole point of practice in Hinduism and Buddhism is you don't come back to this world. My guiding teacher said, "You are born. It is already mistake. You flunked some area in your last life. That's why you came back, to complete what you have flunked." So resurrection is actually a stumbling block. We don't want to come back. We want to get into nirvana. We want to get out of this samsara. Then you come back. What a big deal about this, you know?

## CHUNG HYUN KYUNG

So not only cross, resurrection is a stumbling block. That's why for Asians this great holy man dying that way doesn't give us a big impetus to follow him. You follow that person, and get kidnapped, and get tortured, and killed. You make this bad karma. That's what you want? No. And luckily, in my childhood, I was born and raised in third generation Presbyterian Christians in Korea. My teachers have a very good sense. They didn't teach us this bloody torture of Jesus and all blood dripping, picture of Jesus. They show us this beautiful blond man, and blue eyes, always love children. Magician. Change this bread, multiply bread and fish, and the three Wise Men, and Christmas pageant. So this is my Christianity as a child. In a way, they imprinted in my brain ultimate preparation option for the bland, blond hair, white skin, and a blue-eyed man. That is the best man. So in a way, it is imprinting a set of colonial aesthetics to children's minds.

But all these things changed when I joined the university. When I was a university student in South Korea in the 1970s, it was a burning time. We are under worst military dictatorship in the world, heavily backed by American foreign policy. And every day a student went out in the street, calling for democracy, down to the dictatorship. Then I saw many of my friends, brothers, and sisters got kidnapped, tortured, imprisoned, and killed. Then suddenly, Jesus' story came alive to me. Jesus was not just a beautiful blond man. Jesus was telling the truth, and he speak the truth to the power. It was a very hard truth to say under the empire, dictatorship, and he did. He followed the vision to the end, like my brothers and sisters. And finally, I was also in the movement, kidnapped, and tortured, and imprisoned. And in my torture chamber, I had a point whether I reveal all the identities of my friend, and get released, or I keep their names and I might be killed. That moment I heard this song, like a mantra chanting in my head, "God is my shepherd. Even I walk in the valley of the death, I'm not afraid," because I know God's presence will not save me from the torture, but God's presence will accompany me.

Actually, that torturing experience was the best experience for me in my theological formation, because all through the process I felt His hands, very soft, gentle, but firm hands holding my hands. These hands didn't save me, exempt me from the torturing, but I knew if I live or die, nothing, even torture has this power and principality of our government, American imperialism, nothing, nothing will separate me from this great love of God. And that made me a theologian, liberation theologian.

So when I came to the USA after many different journeys, I actually came to the USA to study Gutierrez Liberation Theology, because in my country at the time if you read Gutierrez, you go to jail. Truth power was dead, because truth makes you free, but truth makes you so afraid in the beginning. So I came here, and I worked in the Korea immigrant church, and I experienced this enormous sexism. I am really

## CHUNG HYUN KYUNG

crucified by this patriarchal church. So I joined the feminist movement and feminist theology, and I heard all these American feminists struggling with the whole meaning of the cross, like Delores Williams and Rita Nakashima Brock. Delores Williams clearly said, "Jesus' cross didn't save any one of us. Cross is, like James Cone said, for black people, African-American, is like a lynching tree in American history. Why we even glorify this suffering? Not cross saved us, but this Jesus determination of telling the truth to the end of his life. Following this integrity, this vision of a kingdom of God, where everybody has a place in this feast of equal, that saved us. That saved us. That empowered us to save ourselves.

A feminist theologian said, this whole redemption theology, atonement theory, is psychologically so unhealthy. It perpetuates so many poor people, oppressed people suffering, beatifying meaning of cross. Why we can't just say just clearly, that is a torture, too, killing political prisoners. And, you know, some other women theologians said, this whole atonement theory is a basis of justifying child abuse. God loved this world so much, and give his only son to be killed to redeem our sin. What a sadistic and masochistic psychology and theology it is. So we say no about this traditional torment theory. But now, after studying Buddhism and practice in Buddhist meditation so long, why I still remain as a Christian? I remain Christian because ironically I believe in the power of the cross. Why? I think of Christianity and Jesus as a major symbol of this religion. It's the only founder who said clearly, in my theology, preferential option for the poor and oppressed, and clearly saying no to power and principality of this world.

So for me the uniqueness of Jesus is not Jesus is the only son of God. No. Buddha is son of God. I am daughter of God. You are all sons and daughters of God. It's not a Jesus uniqueness. For me, Jesus' uniqueness is his uncompromising standing up to the power and principality of the world and saying no, and showing this truth-power power. So in this line of telling the truth, and walking into the truth for the vision of equals, I see many sayings like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Junior, Malcolm X, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Without this cross of Jesus, I don't think I can be a responsible Buddhist. Even I love Asian religions and Buddhism, I do not buy and do not judge. There's no good and evil. No. There is good and evil, and we have to make a judgment to justice be alive. We have to name a spade a spade. Why? Now we are wrecked with the simple structure inside, outside. What is the sin? We are missing the mark. We all turn against God. This savage capitalism, our way of living make this climate change. More than 4,000 people got killed, 11,000 people are still missing in the Philippines. This is not a natural disaster. It's a manmade disaster. And this corporate media never saying truth, even military industry, a complex, killing people all around the world, and supporting your leaders to be elected as the president and representative.

And if we don't say no to that, even our churches, our religious institutions, and I will say academic industrial complex, how many scientists, theologians, politicians,

## CHUNG HYUN KYUNG

economists really say this is the economy, politics, science which can make all of us alive, no matter how much we are polluted, we cannot say we are truth in many situations in our life. For me, cross is that power, say no, this is not right. Torture, no. Oppression, no. This exploitation, no. This kind of greedy hateful lifestyle, no. This is cross for me. This ultimate power of standing up against evil. There's no evil and good? No. There is evil, or evil action, evil expression in this world. And you see it as it is, like a New York subway spirituality. If you see something, say something. (Laughter)

That's as simple as it is. But we don't do that.

So I need Christ. I need Jesus. So in our tradition, we call ourselves Little Jesus. In Philippians they call themselves Little Christ. It's not just worshipping Jesus. It is embodying Jesus. You become Little Christ. You become Little Jesus, and walk the same way. This is the cost of discipleship, what Bonhoeffer talked about. Not just worshipping Jesus, but you embody Jesus. Actually, it is very biblical. This is what Bible said. When Holy Spirit come, you will do greater things than what I did, is what Jesus said. And we are the one who complete the body of Christ. Jesus just started, he was just the head, but we are the one who complete this body. I see it as an evolution of religion. We, ourself, become Buddha. We, ourself, will become Christ. Therefore, I love what minjung theologians, Korean, grassroots theologians are saying. Jesus Christ is collective minjung. Minjung is grassroots people. Collective minjung walking in the vision, living out the vision of a kingdom of God, which is a feast of all equals. Now I want to include all sentient beings, not human beings, but all these dying, crying sentient beings on this earth. They are all collective minjung.

So for me, evolution of Christianity is Christ in you, Christ in you, Christ in you, Christ in between us, around us. We all hold our hands together, and our energy is amplified. We become a bigger Christ. We become a bigger energy to transform our consciousness and materiality. That, for us, is collective minjung. Second coming of Jesus Christ is a rising up of this collective power, of telling the truth, making justice, making peace, and nurturing, protecting, and living with this earth mother. That is what collective Messiah is doing. That's why I love what Sweet Honey in the Rock is singing. "We are the people we have been waiting for." The Messiah is not out there, up there. The Messiah is embodied, materialized, incarnated through all of us when we really get into this place where, according to the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas, Jesus talk about celebration. If you bring out what is within you, what is within you will save you, but if you cannot bring out what is within you, what is within you will destroy you. That is my salvation. That is so in tune with what I learned from Asia, my cosmology. We all carry Buddhahood. We are already Buddha, but we forgot about it, and we all carry this divine spark. God and God is within us, but we forget about it. So what do you do as a person of faith, is all through our life we bring out that Buddha, that God, goddesses into this world.

## CHUNG HYUN KYUNG

So I love this Eastern Orthodox theology, even though, you know, many theologians do not like me after my speech at Canberra, called me syncretist, but, you know, Western Church talk about kenosis, we become lower, lower, like God become a lowly human being, but theosis – we all grow into this abundance, this beauty, this truth, this goodness of a God, God quality, God nature. So every action, every word, everything we do we make it possible to grow into the fullness of God's quality. That is my imagination of a greater salvation. It's not Jesus intervene like Batman and save you, but Jesus sees within you, Christ light within you, fire of Holy Spirit within you every day purify you, nurture you, so you can make, you can become this fullness of God.

Lately, I heard this lecture from Brene Brown. She is a professor. She is a writer, and she wrote about power of vulnerability, ethics of vulnerability. So-called the power we think about in this patriarchal capitalism is power to control other people, power to get what you want. That was the power. But this power Jesus showed us was power of vulnerability. He was killed. He was vulnerable. But what he showed, this power of vulnerability, you do not shrink and become coward in front of the empire, people who have more power than you, people who can control your life, but you still stay, you don't shrink, or you become so proud and boasting, and only think about you, because you think you are much better than other people. Not this shrinking. Not this boasting. But stand firmly on your holy ground, that ground where you are sons and daughters of God, and you yourself is a seat of Christ, you yourself is the Messiah coming, and you yourself complete this great design of the universe by every action, every thought, every choice you make.

So my my favorite Buddhist liberation theologian, David Loy, talks about there's three poisons, which is like a Christian sin, in Buddhism. Three poisons which makes suffering in our life, which is ignorance, hatred, and greed. He said the structural level, nothing like a financial neoliberal capitalism. Only one person take everything. This is really structure manifestation of greed. First poison.

Second poison, military industrial complex. Is there anything in the world which shows this? Structured organized hatred, to kill off other people, and you make money, and you become a winner. That's the second poison. And third poison, creating ignorance in this world. Corporate media, academic industrial complex. They're not telling the real truth. That's why I'm a big fan of Democracy Now. Amy Goodman, there are really independent medias, independent radios in this world.

So there's the three poisons we need to get out. And I also want to say this is the sin, collective sin we need to get out. So here I want to talk about cross theopraxis, theopraxis of the theology of a cross. When I first came, I loved this English word in feminism movement. No bullshit women. So two of your feminists means you

## CHUNG HYUN KYUNG

become a no bullshit woman. So as a theologian, I want to present this morning no bullshit theology of a cross. (Laughter) No bullshit practice of a cross, where this power of vulnerability stands firmly in front of a power and principality and still say no, I'm not going to say you are right, but all the way, too, and keep your vision of a kingdom of God. That is my theopraxis of the cross. I hope we all enjoy this big journey into becoming whole in this journey toward God fullness, and in that journey let us carry our cross. Thank you.

(Applause)