

Sermon Title: **“Null Curriculum #2”**

Bible: **Jeremiah 1:4-10 & 1 Corinthians 13:1-13**

When: on Sunday, January 30th, 2022

Where: about 30 people (plus YouTube live streaming viewers) at Gilroy UMC

Opening Prayer

O Lord, I am standing in front of you, your people, and your church in fear and trembling. O Lord, please be with us in your love and grace. Let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

1. Review of Null Curriculum #1

Last Sunday, I talked about the elephant in the room in the United Methodist Church. Based on the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, especially upon my understanding of tradition and the Bible, I shared my theology. I also brought the article, The Biblical Perspectives on Sexuality and Gender. Is there anyone who read the article that I shared last Sunday?

Today’s message is Null Curriculum #2. The elephant in the room is not a comfortable issue to speak about. It is not only uncomfortable, but also controversial. That’s why I regarded this elephant as a null curriculum, something that is not taught. The lectionary scripture readings changed my mind about bringing up this subject matter.

2. Who are the Prophets? And 1 Corinthians 13

Let us look at the Scripture readings today, according to the lectionary. In the Old Testament, who are the prophets? The prophets are not fortune tellers. They are not talking about the future. They are speaking up on behalf of God. So, what they are saying is not about the future, but about God's grace, mercy, love, and justice. But when we speak up about God's grace, mercy, love, and justice, I hope for us to remember 1 Corinthians 13. It begins with "If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing." Because the Holy Spirit is with us, and in us, we speak up for God's grace, mercy, love, and justice, for God's kingdom. But how can we speak up with love?

3. Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Experience 1

Using the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, based on my experience, I would like to share my theology. Please feel that you can judge me. But please embrace me with your love. Do you have any phobias? Have you ever faced your phobia? Before I came to America, I thought that I was a nice person who automatically loved all people, because Jesus Christ loves all, and I am one of Jesus' followers. But it was not true.

Before I came to America, I had not met any African and African-American people before. When I was in college, I had a time of volunteering at the Goodwill rescue mission in Newark in New Jersey. I met Flip, my African American bro. We shook hands every day, every moment that we encountered each other. When I was in the seminary, there were some

African and African American students. We studied together as a small group. One of them, my wife's spirit sister, Veronica, (she loves Mihyun better than me) came to my graduation to celebrate our achievement. So, I thought that I did not have any phobias about Black people.

However, in some situations, I felt uncomfortable around Black people. I felt myself reacting in ways I did not intend to or want to, almost like a phobia. Mihyun and I went to see a movie in San Francisco. After watching the movie, we needed to get to the parking lot. We were waiting for the elevator. And there was a Black couple waiting too. Then, the door of the elevator opened. And my body did not work well. There was a hesitation. I also felt another hesitation from the Black couple. After a very little hesitation, a Korean couple and a Black couple got into the elevator. The Black couple broke the ice. Even during such a short time, we talked about the movies that we saw, and there was a warm atmosphere afterwards. But this experience made me think about the discomfort in me. What is that? I judge myself. And I try to embrace myself in God's love and mercy. Where is God? How is God? Does God punish me? Does God blame me? Does God embrace me? Does God cry with me?

4. Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Experience 2

I have not met any LGBTQ+ people in Korea, because it is just such a taboo in Korea. When I studied theology in the seminary in the United States, I met LGBTQ+ persons. As a small group, we worked on a presentation. We had meals together, and we worshiped together. In the last year of the seminary, I needed to take an immersion class, kind of a field education class. It was taught by Rev. Dr. Yvette A. Flunder. She is a bishop of the United

Church of Christ, and a founder of the City of Refuge. She is a LGBTQ+ person herself.

During the classes, she shared her testimony. When she realized that she had developed cancer, she thought that “Because I am a lesbian, God has punished me with cancer.” When I heard that, I shouted out in my mind, “NO! NO! God is not like that!” She shared an internal struggle in herself.

Because this class required some field education, I needed to visit the City of Refuge, which is a shelter for LGBTQ+ persons. When the time came, I was afraid. I had known lesbian and gay people at the seminary, but I had never met people who were BTQ+ (bisexual, transgender, queer, plus others) at that time. So, I was just so afraid. My head said to me, “They are just people.” But my emotions and my body did not cooperate. I could not control my fear of the unknown. I was the only student from outside of the United States. There was no classmate to share my fear. As the professor was a gay person, I wondered if it was okay to share my homophobia, because I did not want to offend anyone. And I decided to face my phobia and to be honest about where I was. After the class, before visiting the City of Refuge, I talked with Rev. Dr. Flunder: “I came from Korea, and I have never been to any places for LGBTQ+ persons, and I am so sorry, but I am afraid.” Unlike how I had worried she would react, she answered me, “Please stand by me when you are afraid.” I thought that she could not understand me or that she would blame me. But she just accepted me right where I was. That moment, I felt the love of God. Rather than judging me, I was accepted right where I was, with whatever fear I had, and as who I was.

At the City of Refuge, I heard some testimonies. Some of those there had been forced to escape from their families and their communities, because they had not been accepted as they were. I learned that some people were hit violently by their parents, because of the religious beliefs of their parents. So the only choice they had was to escape from their families and to find a safe place, like the City of Refuge. Where is Love? Where is the love that is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13?

5. No American Phobia?

During COVID-19, there was a significant increase of hate crime, especially against Asians. When I was working in the church office, sometimes, I would take a walk just around the church building, and one time I encountered a person between the church buildings. At that time, I was wearing an awesome T-shirt, which says this pastor has an awesome church. This person asked me if I was a pastor of this church, and started to talk with me. He used a lot of F words. And finally, he asked me where I came from and where I was born. I felt that it was not like when our church members asked. I did not want to talk with him anymore. I tried to avoid him, and he blocked me, and I just ran away. Even with having this experience, I did not develop any phobia around Americans. Why not? That's all because of you. You welcomed me and you call me Hwapyoung. And you accept me as your pastor. There is your love in me. So, even when I have some unpleasant experiences, they cannot defeat your love for me.

6. The Gift of Love

In the Corinthian church, there were a lot of divisions. 1 Corinthians 1:12 says “I belong to Paul,” or “I belong to Apollos,” or “I belong to Cephas,” or “I belong to Christ.” To this un-peaceful and divided church, Apostle Paul wrote a letter and talked about the gift of love. As Paul described himself in 1 Corinthians 13:12, we see in a mirror dimly. We know only in part. My theology and your theology are just several among many. I hope that last Sunday and today’s messages help you to think about your own theology regarding LGBTQ+ persons. We might need to face our fears about those who are different from us. When you face your phobias, I will be with you. I will stand by you. That’s because I was there and because many times, I need you as well. Isn’t this the process of Sanctification, to become more like Jesus? (It is a process). Is it the way of a loving, healing, and growing faith community? Let us remember that love is patient, love is kind, love is not envious or boastful or rude. Love never ends. Let us be hungry for the gift of love more and more!

Closing Prayer

O Lord, I am still in fear and trembling. But I am also in awe, because your Holy Spirit is in us, and because we are the body of Jesus Christ together. We are hungry for your love. Please be with us in your grace and love. In Jesus’ name. Amen.