

“Go to the desert road.” A divine command steered Philip. As a preacher he was to go to the desert road which was not a road, in fact. But Philip followed the command with a childlike innocence and profound trust in God’s mystery. So, there he was, in the wilderness with the Spirit. The absurd command led him to an absurd surprise in the remote place. He saw a chariot moving. It was carrying an influential Ethiopian eunuch. “Go to the chariot and stay near it.” Urgently, the Spirit pushed Philip toward the unknown and unthinkable.

The Ethiopian eunuch was reading the text about the suffering servant from the book of Isaiah. Philip asked him, “Do you understand what you are reading?” The response from the reader was “I need good hermeneutical guidance.” Philip gladly mounted on the chariot. Verse 35 says, “Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.” The connection made between Philip and the eunuch was like a whirlwind. The excitement of the companionship on the chariot was electrifying. The quickly formed friendship crossed over freely the borders of skin color, gender, socio-economic class, and religious background. The classic division between the Jews and Gentiles lost its tenacious, formidable grip. *Howards End* by E. M. Foster vividly describes the reality of classism in British society. A part of the novel says: “Without connection, we are meaningless fragments ... Connect the prose and passion, [which seem to contrast each other.] Both will be exalted, and human love

will be seen at its height.” In such an unlikely place, suddenly human love was shown at its height with the exquisite orchestration of the Spirit.

“Like a sheep, he was led to the slaughter ... In his humiliation, justice was denied him.” When the astounding friendship emerged, the mangled body of the Crucified One was discussed in the presence of the Spirit of the Resurrected Lord. The center of true connection cannot be a particular culture, race, or class. The center is One Lord who draws everyone toward him by giving himself away entirely in selfless love. And each one drawn to the Lord becomes vulnerable to new alarming changes because of the compelling love. Willie James Jennings - in his commentary on the book of Acts - says, “Where God comes, a surprising new follows, such that no one in Israel had ever seen. The new wrought by God will now bind together Philip and the eunuch in a new paradigm of belonging.” “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” The eunuch realized his own body was included in the body of Jesus Christ, just like Philip’s. Water was poured on him in the wilderness. The bond of the extraordinary community was sealed by the baptism for good.

As you know, Nova Scotia is quite different from the wilderness. About 8 years ago, I came to this beautiful part of the world. Here my family and I have been inundated by the characteristic kindness of Nova Scotians in Pictou County and their soothing welcoming warmth. I needed some adjustment though when I

had my first winter here. Before coming to Pictou County, I lived only in apartment buildings in Toronto or in Korea. For that reason, snow removal was not my particular strength. During my first winter in Nova Scotia in 2015, I was shocked to see how much snow we had. And I needed to learn how to use a snowblower. The caring church members and my wonderful neighbors helped me to have the necessary basic knowledge about the machine. One day, I was using it for the first time after we had a huge snowstorm. When I was struggling with it on my driveway, suddenly a gust of wind blew toward me. A bunch of snow that was just made to float in the air by the snowblower all came upon me. I came to know one could be baptized in snow not only in water. Hopefully, it was the baptism in snow and power, which helped me to be born again as a Korean Nova Scotian, a beautiful new identity in Christ.

The surprising grace of the Spirit of God led me to meet and serve two congregations in Pictou County. Thanks to their presence and gifts shared with me at abundance, I became certain that recentering of the culture of a community on the foundation of the broken body on the table was not wishful thinking. The hearty laughter in daily life, the shared heart-wrenching grief of the loss of loved ones, the stories of life both ordinary and unique, occasional good lobster meals, and the joy of singing old gospel pieces and folk songs are all spiritual, human, personal, and communal experiences. Several years ago, on a Sunday morning, I

sang a Korean song. After the service was over, a member of the congregation came up to me to say, “Joon Ki, you told us about how the Korean words of the song could be translated to English but even without the translation, listening to your singing in Korean, I thought I knew what it meant.” For a long time, I doubted that such a community could exist or be formed. I am grateful that the work of the Spirit, and the bountiful love of the congregations made a believer out of me.

In Seoul, there is a cemetery for the missionaries who worked for Korea. It is located near the river in Seoul. I visited the cemetery many years ago. To stand in front of the tombs of the missionaries was such an evocative experience to me. Ruby Kendrick from Texas came to Korea in 1907. Her epitaph in the cemetery remarks, “If I had a thousand lives, Korea should have them all.” I stood there for several minutes in amazement. Deep love leaves an indelible impact on people’s minds, daily living, and history. “Look, here is water! What would stop me from being baptized?” The Ethiopian exclaimed in joy. The Holy Spirit continues to weave the separate stories of life through the discussed Word, water, and the eternal love that is alive in you and me.

When I think about the current challenges that many congregations have faced, I often remember a Korean theologian whose name is Kim Kyo Shin. Kim Kyo Shin lived from 1901 until 1945. He was not an ordained minister but a

schoolteacher and a daring and inspiring theologian. During the time of his life, Korea groaned under the oppressive power of colonialism. But in the body of the Risen Lord, he found hope for the poor and helpless sufferers. A Christian monthly publication was issued by Kim Kyo Shin. There he shared his passionate love for the Word of God and the people in Korea. In the first issue of the publication, he said, “Wipe dust on your feet to the traditions which worship themselves not Christ. Instead, you go to the countryside and mountainside. Meet a poor laborer there. Make it your mission to console his or her burdened soul. Share your discourse of hope in Christ with patience. Even though our companions who listen to us appear hundred years later, what more could we ask for?”

The invoking joy of living in fragments no longer and the blessed taste of what is to come transcend even the limits of time and space. To our great surprise, even in the wilderness, the baptismal water flows. Amen.