

진실로 너희에게 이르노니 너희  
중에 두 사람이 땅에서  
합심하여 무엇이든 구하면  
하늘  
저희를  
두 세  
곳에는 나도 그들 중에  
있느니라.

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**PREACHING**

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마태복음 Matthew 18: 19-20

Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them. (NRSV)

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## The Freedom-Children

Sermon by The Rev. Eunjoo M. Kim, Ph.D.  
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*For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs of according to the promise. (Galatians 3:26-29, NRSV)*

I am much honored to preach in this 11<sup>th</sup> annual Korean Worship and Music Conference. When I learned that this year's theme would be baptism, I was delighted to preach about it.

As we know, baptism is one of the most significant Christian rituals. Through baptism, believers profess to be newly created in Jesus Christ and to live a different life from that of the world. It is no longer they who live but Christ who lives in them.

Some of us were baptized as infants without our personally deciding for it. I wonder why Christian churches practice it. Well, Reformed churches perform infant baptism to emphasize the responsibility of the church to nurture a child as one newly created in Jesus Christ. Through infant baptism, a child is born again into the family of God, and the members of the church promise that they will help the child grow to live a new life in Jesus Christ.

Have you ever seriously thought about what it means to live a new life in Jesus Christ? In other words, what does baptism mean for Christians? Galatians 3:27-28, one of the oldest baptismal formulas, answers this question. It says that "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:27-28).

No longer Jew or Greek, no longer slave or free, no longer male and female, for all of us are one in Christ Jesus! So we, the baptized, are supposed to live a harmonious life without discriminating against people based on their race, class, and gender.

Wow, how radical! Can we disregard race, class, and gender in our daily lives? In our society, people judge others on the basis of whether they are more colored or less-colored, rich or poor, male or female. Consciously or unconsciously, many of us assume that whites are superior to blacks, the upper class is superior to the lower, and the male is superior to the female. We experience these biased attitudes not only in our society but also in our churches.

And the churches in Galatia were no exception. They were founded by the Apostle Paul thousands of years ago in the region of today's Turkey. For Paul, Galatian churches were like his "little children" to whom he gave birth through the terrifying "pain of childbirth" (4:19). Paul had high hopes for them to live a new life according to the gospel of Jesus, that is, to live as one in Christ Jesus regardless of race, class, and gender. However, the churches in Galatia simply continued to live as the children of the world by imposing the Jewish racial law of circumcision on their non-Jewish members. Rather than praying to live harmoniously with different ethnic groups, they might pray a popular Rabbinic prayer, "Lord, I thank you that you have not made me a barbarian, a slave, or a woman."

Informed of this situation, Paul was perplexed, disheartened, and even angry. If the community of the baptized continues the old lifestyle of the world, there is no reason for Jesus to suffer and die on the cross; there is no reason for God to raise him from the dead; and there was no reason for Paul and other Christian martyrs to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ at the risk of their lives.

So, Paul wrote an urgent letter to the churches in Galatia, reminding them that through baptism they were called to live as children of the new age. As such, they have the privilege to enjoy freedom — freedom to regard no one solely from a human point of view and freedom to love others with respect regardless of race, class, and gender: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (3:28).

The Christian Church is the community of the children of freedom. But when the children give up their freedom, their community is no longer the Church of Christ.

What then, about our Korean and Korean-American churches? If Paul were informed of the situation in our churches, especially with respect to gender issues, how would he respond to

us? I am sure that he would send us a copy of his letter to the Galatians, using boldfaced type to emphasize the words:

**“There is no longer male and female  
for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”**

In fact, I was somewhat amazed to receive an invitation from Rev. Charles Ryu to preach and lead a preaching workshop in this conference, because so many Korean and Korean-American Christians have difficulty imagining a woman preaching and teaching as an ordained minister. Obviously, this doesn't happen in many churches.

I still remember a Korean professor whom I met 18 years ago during my student days. When he learned that I was a doctoral student in the area of preaching, he expressed his regret, saying, “Who is going to learn preaching from a woman? Girl, you have stepped out of your place!”

In a sense, he was right. Eighteen years ago, many Korean and Korean-American churches did not allow women to preach or participate in session meetings. The Galatians text was seemingly an unrealistic vision for them. One of my Korean classmates at Princeton Seminary exemplified this attitude: then he became the pastor of a Korean-American church on Long Island, he announced to his church and the Long Island Presbytery that his church would never ordain women to be elders and ministers as long as he was pastor, because women's ordination was against Korean tradition and culture.

Nowadays, however, as you have experienced, our churches are changing. Some open their session meetings and pulpits to women, ordaining them to be elders and pastors, or at least associate or EM (English Ministry) pastors. Indeed, it has taken a long time for our churches to live the baptismal formula of the Galatians text—that we are no longer children of the world but children of freedom in Christ Jesus, free from sexist mentality and prejudice.

Like the churches in Galatia, our churches easily forget what our baptism means. Like the Galatian Christians, we don't want change. We just want to repeat in our churches what we have learned in the world. However, Paul's letter to the Galatians reminds us that we are no longer children of the world; the old way of relating as male and female, although sanctioned by culture and often by the church, should not be the standard of the Christian Church, because God does not distinguish among us based on gender.

If our churches are the community of the children of freedom, no one should judge who a sister is or prescribe what she must do, based on gender. Instead, our churches should bear witness that God's grace in Christ appears equally in women and men and is actualized by gifts of grace in their lives. Yes, as Paul says in Romans, we have gifts that differ not by gender, but according to the grace given to us: some have gifts in preaching, some in teaching, some in administering, some in serving, and some in care-giving (cf. Romans 12:6).

When I served a Korean American church in New Jersey as Associate Pastor one Sunday morning I preached a sermon. I will never forget that after worship, a seven-year old girl came up to me and asked, "Pastor, I wanna be a preacher like you. Would you tell me what I should do from now on to be a good preacher?"

Certainly, this girl was born into the family of God, as a child of freedom. She could freely imagine her future not as a girl in the conventional sexist image but as a gifted child of God.

Today, we baptize this little child with the hope that by baptism he is born into a real family of God, in which he is nurtured as a child of freedom, a child gifted by God without regard to his gender.

Our biological family is a major factor in forming who we are. But, we Christians also experience how crucial our spiritual family is for the future of our children. Just as there is no perfect family, so there is no perfect church. Yet, there may be a church that struggles to realize the vision of the community of the baptized by living out the baptismal formula that "there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

I invite you to join me in prayer that our children are nurtured as children of freedom in the community of those newly created in Christ Jesus. Amen.