

Open Heart, Open Mind, and Open Door

James 2: 1-10

Today is Labor Day Sunday. Today's scripture reading, according to the lectionary, James 2:1-10, is the biblical message reflecting on today's sermon title, "Open heart, open mind, and open door." At first thought, it is not clear how these three components, heart, mind, and door, are related. However, we will find that there is a common thread that holds the three together..

"Open Hearts, Open Minds, and Open Doors" is the United Methodist's trademark phrase expression its mission for evangelism. It is a wonderful catch phrase. And its essence contains the Christian message as well as the Methodist Social Affirmation to the world. To whom and how should we open these three doors: with our hearts, minds and opportunities? I see three doors in this catch phrase.

Jesus said, "I am the gate for the sheep: whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, freely and find pasture." We need to see people we meet and world we live with Jesus' heart, Jesus' mind and Jesus' door.

First of all, there is a door of the heart. What does it mean to have an "open heart"? Until I came to the United States, I had not known what racism is and how it matters, since in Korea, I grew up in a racially homogeneous country. There were some foreigners who were traveling and assigned to stay for a time in Korea, but all the permanent residents were homogeneously Korean. So, there was no concept such as racism in that society at that time. But, in United States, we can see many, many different races and cultures are mixing together in this "melting pot" nation, and so, racism matters.

Until I came to the United States, I had not realized that I, too, had tendencies to feel separate and different from people of other races, which is really a sin before God. When I learned about the issues of racism in seminary in the United States, I found in myself that I had a tendency to see people differently because of my own racism in my heart. One day, I confessed to myself that I had been wrong in my attitude toward others, whom I saw as separate from, and not equal to myself. That was an open-heart moment for me.

When I was ten years old, my family adopted a girl who was the same age as I was. Her name was Kum-sun, and she had no relationship to my family. One night, my oldest sister took this girl from her work and brought her to

our house. She was an orphan and was looking for a place for work and stay. At that time we had four bedrooms shared among nine family members. And now, we had to share the small space with this girl. To make matters worse, my sister brought her to live with us without permission from my family. Nobody complained about the matter, but I was not thrilled.

This strange girl had worked for my family and lived with us for two years. She helped my mom cook, she cleaned the house, and did miscellaneous tasks in our house. This strange girl wanted to talk to me and to help me. But, I rejected her coming closer to me. I didn't even make eye-contact with her. Probably, I was arrogant and discriminated against her. I have no real memory of her, what she was like, at all. My confession is that I was not a good Christian because I did not see her as the same as I am. This realization is the beginning of a path to an open heart, and open eyes to see people in a new perspective. Another word for the beginning of an open heart is "conversion."

Secondly, there is another door to open, the door of our mind. Have you ever thought about Jesus, who came to us to be like us and to identify with us? If we confess that Christ our Lord came to us to become like us, an incarnation of God, we cannot see other people differently from us. They are all children of God. To see others same as us is the opening mind.

The scripture reading, James 2:1-10, teaches us how to love our neighbor as ourselves, practically and realistically. The place where you are seated, with whom you are seated, reflects how you seek to identify yourself.

The Apostle James asks us, "Do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For, if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, 'Have a seat here, please,' while to the one who is poor you say, 'Stand there,' or, 'Sit at my feet,' have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thought?"

Last week I read an article in the newspaper about the issue of Biblical translation, specifically the issue of revising the term, "man," to a neutral noun, "person," so that there is no bias in biblical translation between man and woman. I don't have a problem with either the old or new translation. Mark Twain's famous quote, "It's not the parts of the Bible that I don't understand that bother me, but the parts that I do."

There is discrimination between male and female, in terms of sexism, in our society. This bias takes issue the new translation of the Bible. Though I personally believe that it may be better to have different roles between

male and female in a family, the responsibility of each role must be the same as well as the dignity afforded to each in the image of God between male and female.

I don't deny that everybody has his or her own tendencies for favoritism in all things, which is a person's own right. But, in the universal love of Christ, we have to treat people equally, no matter how he or she looks. Sexism is another avenue of discrimination in our society.

The Bible intends for us to recognize that discrimination is common in community, and in society, the most common form of discrimination is economic discrimination. On Labor Day, we remember those who labor long hours for low wages and struggle for dignity and basic human rights. There are "3D" jobs among under-developed countries: dirty, difficult and dangerous jobs. Many of us don't know much about how these "3D" jobs are directly related to the goods that we enjoy in the developed countries of the world at cheap prices.

Until the 1980's, South Korea was an under-developed country. During the 1970's, the Korean government undertook these "3D" jobs from the world by providing dirt-cheap labor. Because the people of Korea had recently experienced terrible wars within its borders, Koreans were awakened from complacency in life. During this time, Koreans were generally alert in spirit, the children studying very hard and becoming competitive school as well as the job market. People worked very hard at "3D" jobs for decades, which resulted in Korea becoming one of the top twelve countries in the world in economy and industry by the 1980's.

Labor is a mandatory command given to humans. When we read the Bible, in Genesis we find that labor was given to Adam as a punishment by God. "The Lord God said, 'See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'— Therefore, the Lord sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken."

"By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

(Genesis 3:19)

Very often, the status of one's job is what determines discrimination by others. "So, what do you do?" You know the old question: "What do you do?" When we engage in small talk, when we meet a new person, the question often arises, "What do you do?" Most of the time, the questioner

is asking who your employer is, and what kind of paid-work you do. It helps us to get a glimpse inside someone's life if we find out what kind of job they hold.

Work occupies so much of our lives. Most working adults spend more time at work than with their families. For some people, work is just a job; for others, it's the joy of getting paid for something they love to do. For some people, work is life-giving; for others, it's life-depleting.

We need to see jobs and work as equally important in life. There is no difference between the dirty job and clean job, the safe job and dangerous job, the difficulty job and easy job. In essence, if a job is beneficial to others and helpful to others and fits the general good, it is a worthy job. The ethics of work tells us not to work only for the money and bread, but also for others and the bread of work. That is a new mind set for life in the world.

We are all worker. Without work we can live and exist in the world. And also work is blessing, opportunity and assurance from God. God is the worker too. Jesus said, "Since God is working I work." There is comfort and assurance for the laborer from the Lord our God. Jesus told us, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matt. 11:28)

Lastly, there is a final door that needs to be opened. This door is the door of the church, as well as ministry. So, what is ministry in daily life? How do we live out our faith in our daily routine? Let's think about ministry in daily life by using Jesus' image. We Christians are defined as being of the earth, light to the world. Faith is not a noun but the activating of belief.

Apostle James reminds us, "Don't treat people differently according to what he or she wear." Everybody wears their work uniform differently. But the worth of works are equal.

There is an episode related to Stanford University I have heard of dating back a long, long time ago, before Stanford University existed. An old couple, wearing ordinary clothing visited Harvard University as tourists. While viewing the campus, the couple knocked on the door of the president of Harvard University. The president found an ordinary old couple, seeming like common tourists, standing when he opened the door. He said to them, "What can I do for you?" The old man asked, "May we come in?" They were invited into the president's office.

After introductory conversation regarding Harvard University between the visitors and the president, the visitor, the ordinary looking old man suggested that he would like to donate something to the school. The president replied that Harvard School is rich, and suggested that they make the

ir donation perhaps to another place. This was actually the President's way of dismissing the humble, old people with a polite, "No, thank-you." The old man asked the president, leaving his office, "By the way how much money would it cost to run a school this size?" The president replied, "Probably, it would be a sum beyond calculation." The old visitor's name was Stanford. He then traveled out to California and built Stanford University with the money he wanted to donate to Harvard University. The president of Harvard University misinterpreted the old visitor and dismissed him in his mind because he looked an ordinary old man.

Related to labor, or job, we need to open our eyes and minds that there is our ministry in our works. Martin Luther spoke of the "priesthood of all believers," a theological concept that points to the fact that ministry is not just the work of the pastor. Luther reminded the laity (non-clergy)=20to be "little Christs" to each other. According to Luther, God's people are to pray for each other. "They are to listen to their sisters' and brothers' confessions of sin and cries of distress. They are to speak God's cheering word of forgiveness and consolation. They are to be agents of God's, overflowing goodness by ministering to the poor and oppressed."

Last Sunday, early in the morning, I was told by Sun that I should not use the new towels hanging in the bathroom, as it was for our guests that day after church. I understand that it was hospitality to prepare clean and nice towels for our guest. If we didn't have guests and didn't use those nice towels on that day, they would be nothing but decoration. Likewise, our faith is not for the decoration of character, but is there for us to live out and to activate our faith. In other words, faith is our ministry in life.

Today's gospel is a message of not delivering to others by word or mouth but by our hands and feet. This is a question of our ministry, "How to evangelize to those who among our families as well as to co-workers." Open Hearts, Open Minds, and Open Doors to neighbors, strangers and untouched and unmet friends.