New Hope Global Sermon **The Call to a House of Prayer for All Nations**

**Introduction**

The theme God has brought for the sermon this week comes from 3 sources that have coalesced and captured my own heart: 1. Isaiah 56: 7 -“My house shall be a house of prayer for all nations.” 2. The book cover from *The Church from Every Tribe and Tongue*, designed by the talented Chinese artist He Qi. This is the book I am reviewing this week. And the gathering of a new multicultural community for the house blessing of our home this coming Saturday Feb. 12.

1. **My house shall be a house of prayer**

The full text of this Isaiah passage is:

And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant—7these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” Isa. 56:6-7 ESV

This is one of the future passages declaring God’s intent of the in-gathering of Gentiles as well as Jews in the Salvation Christ brings. Jesus Himself quoted this passage (Mk.11:17) in His cleansing of the temple right before He died. My focus in this sermon will not be on the commercialism, greed, politics and human desecration that Jesus denounced as he drove the money changers out of the temple. These factors are still present in the church globally today – and certainly need a clean sweep from the Spirit to make God’s presence and purposes in the church holy again. But, instead, I just want to focus on God’s heart in wanting the church today, in all the forms and diversity of those who gather in His name, to be faithful to his call to be a house of prayer for all nations. This includes the Spirit’s work in worship, in praise, in intercession, in dance and drama – all the expressions which a global-centered church can do so beautifully.

Clark Pinnock says in his seminal book *Flame of Love:*

Iconoclism (opposition to the religious use of images) has impoverished the life of the church and often reduced worship to a cognitive affair. This means that the Spirit is denied certain tools for enrichment. We are impoverished when we have no place for festivals, drama, processions, banners, dance, color, movement, instruments, percussion and incense. There are many notes on the Spirit’s keyboard which we often neglect to sound, with the result that God’s presence can be hard to access. . . We do ourselves harm when we eliminate arts, drama, color, vestments, pageantry, incense, saints, . . sculpture” (C Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, IVP, 1996, pp,121-122).

This is why as a pastor I encouraged the color, the banners, the dance, the vestments, the musical instruments, the various forms of music and joys of multicultural worship as often as I could. In fact, in the more traditional church buildings where I served, I was always in vestment to eliminate any focus on me as a woman pastor and keep the holiness of my role in the forefront. I was also delighted to wear stoles with various symbols that speak God’s messages for the season. . . In our most recent house church, there are such fond memories of times when we could all stand and dance and clap as we marched inside the house singing “God is good all the time; he put a song of praise in this heart of mine.” Our African members often led those processions and lifted our hearts right into the Lord’s presence! Then in smaller prayer gatherings we would raise our hands in praise, or fall on our knees in contrition as the Spirit led us in heart-felt prayers. A house of prayer for all nations includes the blessing of worship in praise as well as confession and intercession expressed in a variety of different cultural forms. Knowing God’s heart for all the world’s peoples, it is no wonder this diverse call is so fulfilling.

A couple of chapters in Jay Moon’s book *Intercultural Discipleship* describe this enlarged understanding of multicultural worship: ch. 4 Symbols speak what words can’t; ch.7 Stories portray it, not just say it; ch. 9 Music, Dance and Drama – we become what we hum” (noted in Ajith Fernando’s book *Discipling in a Multicultural World*, Crossway Books, p. 160). The intellectual approach to God in prayer and worship in the northern hemisphere of the West needs the infusion of the passion, movement, drama, liturgy and pageantry more prevalent in church in the southern hemisphere.

1. **Insights from the book *The Church from Every Tribe and Tongue***

This book likens “Spirit-Christology” (editors Gene Green, Stephen Pardue, K.K. Yeo, Langham Global Library, 2018, p.18) in the early church with its expressions in the Majority World today as seen on the continents of Africa, Asia and Latin America. These Majority World voices are, indeed, “fresh winds of God’s work throughout the world.” The essayists note that Roman Catholics, Pentecostals and charismatics together constitute three-fourths of all Christian global membership (Ibid, p. 3).. Obviously, that has profound implications of how “a house of prayer for all nations” is expressed.

For example, at Yonggi Cho’s Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul South Korea –“the largest single congregation in the world” (Wonsuk Ma, “Two Tales of Emerging Ecclesiology in Asia”, Ibid, editors Green et al, p. 63) – prayer has been a signature mark of the church since its inception. Here is how prayer is practiced:

 To provide various spaces for people to come and experience God’s power, the church ahs developed many prayer programs in addition to the traditional daily dawn prayer and Wednesday evening prayer. . . . it has instituted a special series of prayers such as Daniel Prayer (for 21 days)and 40 Day Dawn Prayer. . .The massive Jashil Choi Fasting Prayer Mountain draws thousands of people from different churches in Korea and far beyond. Praying for healing and life’s problems is a regular feature of all services in the church.

 Every gathering of the church is a space and time where God’s power and love is expected and experienced. . . The lively and contemporary pre-worship music and prayer welcome the worshippers who fill the auditorium. . . The post-sermon session of ministry is rather extended. Normally it begins with a corporate prayer time when each member is encouraged to put his or her problems into the Lord’s care, based on the sermon just heard. The famous three shouts of “Juyo!” (Lord!) at the beginning of this corporate prayer powerfully transform thousands of individuals into a spiritual community The auditorium-filling prayers and shouts are followed by a prayer led by the preacher. . . The prayer is a mixture of petition to God and a command to the force(s) responsible for the problem. This is the real climax of the service, when shouts of “Amen” and “Hallelujah” continue. This ministry session ends with the eruption of praise and thanksgiving (Ma, Ibid, p. 66).

As the Lord promised, “I will give them joy in my house of prayer” (Isa. 56:7). When my work as Secretary for the Church Renewal Commission took me to Asia, I experienced this same exuberance in worship and prayer at the large Hope of Bangkok Church in Thailand. You could almost tangibly feel the Spirit’s presence moving among the thousands in the large theatre where the church assembled. There was joy alright! Then in South Korea, Keith and I went to the Yoido’s Prayer Mountain outside Seoul. At that time (in the mid 1980’s) there were buses that took people up to the Mountain Center where a large worship building had been constructed. From there were trails leading to the prayer cells carved out on each side of the mountain – cells for women on one side and for men on the other. Each cell was only large enough for one pray-er at a time. It extended far enough back to lay prostrate before God but was only high enough to kneel or sit for prayer. As I looked around every cell within my range of sight was filled. I spoke only enough Korean to give the normal superficial greetings or thank you in the language, but I could hear the women shouting out their prayers to God. There was evident weeping and prayers of strong intercession, but there was equally singing and prayers of praise. Without even knowing the language, I could sense the encounters with God each woman was having. That mountain represents a specific slice of what God’s temple for prayer for all the nations looks like. It was transformative! But the genuineness, the faith, the exuberance in encountering God can be replicated in every prayer gathering in Jesus’ name around the world. Christians serve a God who loves to hear and answer prayer!

1. **Our own house blessing celebration on Saturday February 12**

The upcoming celebration we will have, as we dedicate our new house to the Lord, provided the third catalyst for the sermon topic this week. The people who are coming have all been part of God’s amazing provision and help in furnishing this house. They are from Brazil, Indonesia, Japan, China, India, Kenya, South Korea, and the U.S. There will be an international potluck – with two separate places to eat that can maintain the covid-related prescribed distancing – and a special time of gathering in worship for prayer and praise. My goal is just to offer praise in thanksgiving for how the Lord has worked and to dedicate this house to the Lord together. We will see how the different cultures represented make this truly a house of prayer for all nations. None of us are Jewish Christians. But we each are foreigners (in the Biblical sense) who love the Lord, serve Him, keep the Sabbath and hold to His commandments. We are God’s family of faith.

May these examples and exhortation for all Christians to be part of a house of prayer for all nations be a driving force in this new year. Then we will minister to the Lord and profoundly affect what happens in history around us by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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 February 7th 2022