

Han and Communal Suffering-Asian Heritage Month May 16, 2021

When Heather and I approached the Worship and Music Committee about this Sunday we joked today would be the equivalent of a teacher showing a film in class during a particularly hectic week. It has been that, with the adjustment to Heather being away and numerous hours spent on ZOOM at the annual meeting of Western Ontario Waterways Region of the United Church. We do have a video reflection this morning and hopefully you'll find it relevant and engaging.

I picked this video in large part because May is Asian Heritage Month. There probably has never been a more important time to recognize this in worship than now. COVID-19 and the general political atmosphere has emboldened some to publicly to express hateful racist rhetoric and carry out indignities and physical assaults. While we have all suffered during this pandemic, the suffering for East Asian people has been magnified by ignorance and hate.

The scriptures you just heard were suggested to me by a couple of colleagues of Korean descent, Rev. Mi'Yeon Kim and Rev. Jun-hyok Chon to illustrate the Korean concept of han. Han is a complex term that refers to a very specific kind of suffering that is communal, resulting from frustrated hope. Han is suffering that results from ongoing injustice experienced by a people, suffering that is unresolved, internalized and passed on from one generation to the next. Suffering that can result in physical symptoms.

Han has been central to the development of Korean theology over the years. It might help us to come to terms with the vast societal suffering we are all experiencing to greater and lesser extents depending on the privilege we carried with us into the pandemic. In a couple of minutes, we're going to watch a video of Kathy Khang talking about han and communal suffering. Kathy Khang is a Korean American Christian who has worked in various church settings. She is an author who likes to write about the intersection of gender, culture and faith.

Afterward, I'll offers some questions for reflection and a time of silence to give them some consideration...

Video—[Communal Suffering](#)—Kathy Khang

Questions

- What suffering have you as an individual and we as a society inherited from past generations, both suffering inflicted on others and suffering inflicted on us?
- What is the legacy of suffering that we will carry with us from this pandemic?

- What helps you to stay present to suffering? What keeps you from running away or from numbing yourself to suffering? What is the role of community, and more specifically church community in helping us work through suffering?

Silent Contemplation

Prayer

God, who desires and actively works for healing and communion among the whole of creation, stir our faith in your active presence that we may sit in the tension that such questions provoke until a gift of grace emerges and we are liberated to live courageously and joyfully. Amen.