

Today is Human Relations Day, which is one of the special Sundays in The United Methodist Church. On this day, we, the followers of Jesus Christ in The United Methodist Church, are called to recognize all God's children's right to realize their full potential as human beings in relationship with one another. This right accompanies by responsibilities.

On this day at Kona United Methodist Church, we have the scriptures, telling about the blind man since birth and whose sight was restored by Jesus. In the story, Jesus miraculously healed a man born blind. Now, we would think this would turn the Pharisees, the church leaders who were skeptical of Jesus, into believers. But there was no such luck. They questioned the man who'd been healed over and over again until he finally said, "I don't know how He did it! But I know this. I was blind, but now I can see."

In speaking figuratively, I think we all are somewhat born blind to other human beings. When a baby is born, he knows nothing about how to relate to others. He observes and responds to the relationship initiated by people around him, such as parents, grandparents, and siblings. He is touched by these loving people and learns how to relate to others. His blindness in human relations is healed by the loving touch of these caring people around him.

Often, we are blinded by our thoughts, agenda, and beliefs in human relations. Unless we acknowledge our "blindness" in life and try to work on it by listening and learning "otherness" in life, our blindness has great potential to harm others. In the United Methodist Church, we have three simple rules—Do no harm. Do good. And stay in love with God. Sometimes our trying to do good harms others because of our blindness.

What is happening for the people of Israel when Psalm 137 was written is one of the examples. They were refugees living in squalor in camps in what is now Iraq. They had been forcibly deported from Israel against their will by the Babylonian Empire. It was a deliberate attempt to destroy these people's ethnic identity and create a single Empire-wide culture across the Babylonian expanse. The good thought they had was uniting all in one culture—Babylonian culture. By force, they tried. Their desire or agenda blinded them and harmed others.

For the people of Israel, their culture was associated with their faith in God Yahweh. And their worship was centered on the single sanctuary of the Temple in Jerusalem. The Babylonians were so blinded to the culture of Israel. They even asked the people of Israel to sing a worship song of God for them. Psalm 137 we read today expressed the pain they had. The cultural incompetence of Babylonians hurt the people of Israel. Was there an apology? No. So, God had to intervene later in history to liberate His people.

In speaking of history, let's look at the history of Hawaii. The illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom and Queen Lili'uokalani on January 17, 1893, is another example that our blindness in human relations hurt other human beings. American businessmen and leaders, including religious leaders, joined the forces to take over the Hawaiian Kingdom by calling themselves "the Committee of Safety." They seized power by illegally occupying the government building, with the assistance of 162 U.S. Marines and Navy sailors. They thought they were doing good for the Hawaiian Kingdom without knowing what native Hawaiians wanted. They harmed others with their blindness.

Thankfully, President Bill Clinton in 1993 recognized this and officially apologized for the participation of the United States in this illegal and harmful activity. We, the followers of Jesus Christ in the California-Pacific Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church, acknowledged this also and passed the resolution of apology in 2018 as an act of repentance. Every year, on Human Relations Day, we, the United Methodists in Hawaii, acknowledge this harmful history we have created with our blindness and apologize to native Hawaiians as they are still struggling with the trauma created by us—"non-native" Hawaiians.

Let me share my experiences of cultural incompetency. These experiences happened at one of the churches I served as a pastor. I was the first non-white pastor this church had. I was the first female pastor. I was the youngest pastor they ever had. It was obvious that they did not know how to relate to me as their pastor at first because of my "otherness" they saw. But, I knew they were trying.

For those people who don't know me yet, let me tell you about me briefly. I was born and raised in Korea until I immigrated to the United States when I was 15. Since then, I was brought up in Southern California. I spent all my youth years,

young adulthood, and adult life in Southern California until I moved to Kentucky, Chicago, San Francisco, and now to Hawaii.

People at that church asked me about the politics in Korea when I arrived at this church to be a pastor. Back then, I had no clue about the politics in Korea. People told me about their Korean war experiences in Korea and asked me about it, which I had no clue about it also. One of the church members watched a Korean drama and told me that she knew everything about Korea now, and she could understand me well. These were just mild expressions of their cultural blindness—the cultural incompetency. One of the aggressive ones I've ever had was trying to force me to think and behave as what they believe how I should be as a Korean. They were friendly church people who attempted to related to me, but they missed it totally. Instead of trying to see me as "Sunny" and trying to spend time with me to hear me and learn about me, they just imposed their idea of "Sunny" and tried to relate to their imaginary person named "Sunny." It did not go well. They were frustrated, and I was also frustrated. However, gradually we learned to hear each other and learn from each other in our relationships as we came together in God's name.

Honestly, I had to deal with my blindness to Americans also. I thought all Americans are like Americans living in Southern California at first, until I moved to Kentucky to do my doctoral study, moved to Chicago to be with my husband after marrying him, and moved to San Francisco and Hawaii for ministry. There is no single definition that can describe all Americans I have met in my journey.

Our blindness to "otherness" and our unwillingness to hear and learn from others cause the civil unrest we are experiencing these days. "I am right, and you are wrong" is the attitude of our blindness we see in our society these days. It seems like there's not a lot of hope unless we all encounter Jesus on a personal level, like the blind man in today's scripture.

I do believe that Jesus still gives sight to the blind. We are stumbling around in spiritual darkness without Jesus, which causes moral darkness. Jesus longs to open our eyes and let in the light of His grace. I pray that we all humbly ask God to help us to acknowledge our blindness and open our eyes to His incredible love today to restore a peaceful community in Jesus Christ. I pray this in Jesus' name. Join with me. Amen.