

## **A Bell of Love (Phil 1:1-5). FPC of Leesburg, 11-25-18**

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It's a great honor and a great privilege for me to stand before you. I am here today, on behalf of Hwangdeung Church in Korea, to express my sincere gratitude to you for your generous gift of the Bell of Love which you donated to my church in 1949. Thank you so much! On behalf of my home country, I also would like to say, thank you, to American churches that sent so many missionaries who risked their precious lives to deliver the Good News of Jesus Christ and His great salvation to Korea in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Before I share the story of the Bell of Love, I would like to read Scripture verses with you. Let's turn to Philippians 1:1-5 (NASB).

1. "Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons:
2. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you,
4. always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all,
5. in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.

To the apostle Paul, the church of Philippi was the object of his joy. So Paul's offering of prayers for the church was filled with joyful heart. One of the primary reasons that made the apostle joyful was that the Philippian church had participated in the Gospel from the first day of its birth until the time when the apostle wrote the letter.

The work of the Philippian church that is mentioned in the apostle's warm greeting reminded me of your church. To my knowledge, the First Presbyterian Church of Leesburg was founded in 1869 by two elders. (By the way, congratulations on your soon-to-be 150 years anniversary.) What a history! I believe your church, like the church at Philippi, has participated in the Gospel since it was founded in 1869. One of the fruits of your participation in the Gospel is my home church in South Korea.

The place I was born is a typical suburban agricultural community. In this peaceful village, a Presbyterian church was founded in 1928. This year, the church celebrated its 90th-anniversary. I began to attend the church in my childhood, and it was my home church until I left the area to go to college.

My home church has a historical bell hanging in a tall bell tower. At some point, the church began to call it the Bell of Love. The diameter of the bell is 27.5 inches. This church bell has been ringing every day since it was transported to the church by ship from the First Presbyterian Church of Leesburg, Florida in 1951.

I still remember beautiful memories of my childhood related to the church bell. The bell-ringer would stand on the ground and repeatedly pull and release a long rope early morning every day. I believe some farmers may have used the ringing sound of the bell as an alarm clock to get up and start their daily work in the field. The members of Hwangdeung Church woke up and headed to the church for their dawn prayer meeting. It also rang for the Wednesday evening, Sunday morning, and Sunday afternoon services. Thankfully, it rings until the present day.

This bell, known as the oldest among currently existing church bells in Korea, was manufactured in the U.S. in 1884. The year 1884 included two significant events in Korean political and religious history. Politically, there was the Gapsin Revolution, a failed three-day coup d'état. Some Korean reformers tried to initiate changes in the country "including eliminating social distinctions by abolishing discrimination of lower class people and abolishing the legal privilege of high class."<sup>1</sup> Religiously, the first Protestant

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<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia, "Gapsin Coup," accessed November 12, 2018.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gapsin\\_Coup](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gapsin_Coup)

missionary, Horace Allen from the U.S., also set foot on Korean soil in 1884.

In 1949, Rev. Kay Il Seung who was the former senior pastor of my home church was studying in the U.S. When he visited the First Presbyterian Church in Leesburg, FL., he asked the church to donate the bell when he heard they were planning to replace it.

A plaque on the wall of Hwangdeung Church describes how the church received the bell. This is what the plaque says:

The bell was a donation from the First Presbyterian Church of Leesburg, Florida. Rev. Kay Il Seung sent the bell from the U.S. by ship on the 16th day of January in 1950, but on the way to Korea, the Korean War broke out. It caused the bell to remain in Tokyo for a while, and finally, it was delivered to Hwangdeung Church via Busan harbor on the 10th day of June in 1951. . . .The passage to transfer the bell to Korea was \$53, but the love offering from Rev's C.A. Thompson, J.E. Anderson, and S.B. Clowwer covered it in full. All members of Hwangdeung Church have resolved to spread the Gospel whenever this historical "Bell of Love" is ringing. This "Bell of Love" will keep resounding to save many lost souls. As mentioned on the plaque, many people from Hwangdeung Church have devoted themselves to the ministry of spreading the Gospel both locally and globally.<sup>2</sup>

Hwangdeung Church raised many devoted Christian workers. A digital document released from the church shows that among those who heard the Bell of Love every morning, 15 pastors and 2 full time ministers are currently involved in Christian ministries across the country. In 2016, the bell was recognized as a historical relic by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Korea and Iksan PCK, the local assembly.

I came to Fort Worth, TX 2004 and planted Hanmaum International Baptist Church. Since then I've been ministering to the church. Recently, while writing about the story of the Bell in the introduction part of my Ph.D. dissertation, I became curious about the existence of the First Presbyterian Church of Leesburg.

I thought to myself: Where is Leesburg? How do I spell Leesburg? So I googled it. Does the church still exist? Again, I googled it and, to my surprise, I found the name of the church on the website. My next question was whether or not this church I found on the website was THE church in the historical record. If so, I thought, did my home church ever contact the FPC? If not, should I contact the church?

All of the thoughts finally prompted me to write a note on your homepage and call the church office to make sure this was the church. It was Ms. Susan Sapp who kindly sent me a reply.

On October 24, 2018, Ms. Sapp sent me an email. When I opened it up, I noticed it was a good tidings from Leesburg. Wow! What a joy! She wrote:

"Dr. Heo:

I have good news. Well, I found a reference. . .regarding the Bell of Love. . .in the record book handwritten for Minutes to Congregational meeting from June 19, 1949!<sup>3</sup>

Ms. Sapp spent her precious time to find the historical records regarding the donation of the Bell. In this regard, I admire your meticulousness, keeping the historical archive faithfully.

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<sup>2</sup> Jongsu Heo's Translation.

<sup>3</sup> Susans Sapp. Email. October 24, 2018.

I was glad to hear that the First Presbyterian Church of Leesburg has faithfully engaged in Christian missions both locally and globally. Christian mission has the power to change the fate of people, communities, and nations. One of the great examples is Korea. The beginning of Korean Protestantism was in the 1880s. At that time, the predominant religions in Korea were Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shamanism. People had suffered from physical and spiritual poverty. The country had no hope of light. There was a man named Soo-jung Lee (Rijutei) who went to Japan in 1883. After his conversion under the influence of a Japanese Protestant Christian, Lee began to translate the Gospel of Mark and published it in Yokohama, Japan. Soo-jung Lee (Rijutei) also requested American churches to send missionaries to Korea. His heartfelt letter of request touched the pioneering Protestant missionaries.

In 1885, Horace Grant Underwood became the first official Presbyterian missionary to Korea, and Henry Appenzeller became the first Methodist missionary. The missionaries founded hospitals and colleges and began to share the gospel message, which gave hope of light to Korean people who were going through political and spiritual turmoil.

One of the early missionaries named Ruby Kendrick came to Korea from Texas, but sadly she died of acute appendicitis at the age of 25 in Korea. She lived only for 9 months in Korea. She loved Korea and wanted her body buried in Korea. On her tombstone, a phrase is inscribed: "If I had a thousand lives to give, Korea should have them all." Missionary Ruby Kendrick was a kernel that fell on the Korean soil and died, but her death resulted in producing many seeds (John 12:24). Many Western missionaries sacrificed their lives to bring the Light of life to the dark country.

According to statistics, in 2017, South Korea has sent out 27,436 missionaries, second only to the United States. These missionaries are in over 170 countries throughout the world.<sup>4</sup> In contrast with these positive numbers, Christianity in both USA and Korea are declining. It is a fact. We are under attack of secularism and materialism. According to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, evangelicals make up 26 percent of this country. The 26 percent figure is the average of the U.S., but many states still record under 5 percent. Many urban areas in the U.S. have under 5 percent evangelicals.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the current statistics of the Christian population in the U.S. shows the necessity of evangelistic efforts. Alister E. McGrath, a Northern Irish theologian, diagnoses why the number of churches in England has declined to under 10 percent. It is "because the church stopped doing evangelism."<sup>6</sup> This simple statement also challenges us all to participate in the Gospel again.

I hope and pray that today's event should not just be a moment of commemorating an event in the past. Instead, today should be a moment for all of us to resolve to pull and release the long rope of the church bell allotted to each one of us to wake up those who are in a deep sleep spiritually. Ringing the bell is a symbol of participating in the Gospel. Until the day that our Lord comes back, we have to keep on proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ who died and rose again from the dead to save us.

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<sup>4</sup> Tim Challies, "Which Country Sends the [Second] Most Missionaries" Accessed November 12, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> J. D. Payne, *Pressure Points: Twelve Global Issues Shaping the Face of the Church* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 17-19.

<sup>6</sup> Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century: A Comprehensive Guide for New Churches and Those Desiring Renewal*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 351.