

A Message to the Leaders of the Korean Church

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Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. (John 17:20-21)

Our Lord's great prayer just before his betrayal and arrest, one might say, His dying wish (유언), was that his disciples and those following them down through the generations and centuries would be one. This deep desire of Our Lord that we be one, that we love one another as he loved us (see, for example, John 13:24-25, John 15:12-17) was echoed throughout the writings of the apostles Paul and John. Jesus, Himself, indicates that it is the main condition upon which the successful completion of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) depends. As I read passages like Philippians 2:1-5, 1 John 1:3-5, 2:10-11, 4:20, Romans 12:9-10, Ephesians 2:14-15 and others, I hear this heart cry of the Father expressed in the words of His faithful apostles.

Oh, how we, who call ourselves by the name of Jesus Christ, we who are Christians; oh, how we have grieved the Father through the centuries with our divisions, our jealousies, our separations from one another, all our sin that has torn the very fabric of the Body of Christ. Jesus Christ has suffered far more wounds to His body in the many years following the Crucifixion than he ever did under the Roman lash and upon the rough wooden Cross. We who are the Church of Jesus Christ are His body here on earth.

Many years ago, my father, Fr. Archer Torrey (대천덕 신부님), had a vision to build a center for raising up a new generation to love and serve God. His heart's desire was that this center be a means to bring healing to the Korean Church and to the Korean nation. His earnest prayer was that North and South would once again be one and that the Church be one, that we would embrace one another in humility regardless of all that separates us, repenting to one another and forgiving one another. He knew that through this, our broken society could begin to know the love of God and the healing power of the Holy Spirit. His dream began to take physical shape when Jesus Abbey was granted permission to build a school and youth training center on the property leased from the Forestry department for the Three Seas Ranch. This would become the Three Seas Center.

After my father passed away in August of 2002, the Lord placed a strong burden on my heart to prepare for the opening of North Korea. He showed me that the Three Seas Center was to be a place dedicated to that work of preparation. The members of Jesus Abbey, including my mother, Jane Grey Torrey, my father's successor as the Chairman of the Jesus Abbey Religious Corporation, confirmed this word and gave to me the responsibility for overseeing the Three Seas and all that is related to it. After working

from the United States for several years to pursue this, my wife, Liz Torrey, and I returned to Korea to live at the Three Seas Ranch in 2005.

In the years following this call from God, the Lord has continued to mature the vision bring together a small team committed to making it a reality. One of the things that God showed us clearly during this time was that the work of national healing, of national restoration, was a generational work. Even though unification between North and South Korea may come about in one form or another within the near future, the process of bringing about unity of hearts will take generations. With this in mind, in 2010, we opened the River of Life School to raise up the Unification Generation. This is an alternative middle and high school where students of all type—rural students, city students, the wealthy and the poor, students from cross culture families (다문화가족), North Korean refugee students, the young people of Jesus Abbey, “missionary kids”, all sorts of students—are brought together to learn from one another and, at first hand, how to seek reconciliation and unity across all barriers.

Along with building this school, we are building the Three Seas Center. It is to be a place for training teachers to teach Christianly and to serve as a support and strength to the Christian alternative school movement. It is to be a place to research about North Korea and to prepare people for the work of evangelizing the North. It is to be a place where young people from across the nation can come for training. With the River of Life School being the central core of the Center, the Center and the School together will be a vehicle for God to use to restore this nation.

In the fall of 2002, as I was grappling with this call from God on my life, a call that would require me to embark on a many-years’ long effort at the not-young age of 53, I was beseeching God to supply the great amount of money that would be needed to build and operate the Center as well as provide for my own family—my two college-age sons and my daughter in high school. As I was praying, the Lord spoke clearly in my mind, so strongly that I was stopped in my tracks and did not move. He said to me, “Don’t ask Me for money!” This word was a shock to me. He continued, “You are my workman, I will see that you have all you need. Don’t ask Me for money.” This was not an easy word for me to receive. I had been raised by my father to bring my needs before the Lord and ask for His provision. Certainly, our Lord, Himself, commanded his disciples to do the same. This is a foundational principle of Jesus Abbey. Along with this principle is the complementary one of not asking people for assistance, not to do any fund-raising. The great irony here was that my father had already determined that the building of the Three Seas Center was a task that was bigger than Jesus Abbey could accomplish on its own. He discerned that in this case, because it was not for our own needs and because it was for the sake of the Church and the Nation, we were supposed to seek partners to work with us and to provide funds. Now with this word of God to me personally, the spirit and practice of Jesus Abbey were turned upside down. I was *not* to pray to God for provision but I *was* to ask others for help! As I struggled with these thoughts throughout that morning so long ago, I finally came to where I should have been at the beginning. I said, “Then, Lord, what do you want me to pray for?” The response came back as strongly and as clearly as before, “Pray for the unity of the Korean Church!” My immediate reaction was, “Lord! I don’t have enough faith for that! Easier

to pray for millions of dollars to fall from Heaven...” As I continued in contemplation, the Lord told me that He would use me to spread this message of unity and that I would call out to my brothers and sisters in the Korean Church by the tens of thousands. Almost immediately that began to happen. In the years since, I have proclaimed God’s heart and desire for the Church to be one in great churches and in small ones, through the media and through my writings, to students in college and clergy at their gatherings. This is the heart of God. I also realized that day when the Lord spoke to me so clearly that this was, indeed, the most important preparation for the opening of North Korea. There are many ways that we need to prepare but they are all worthless if we do not go in with one heart and one mind in the Name of Jesus Christ. If the Korean Church goes into North Korea in strength in its current condition, our brethren in the North will not see or understand the love of God. Instead, they will see our divisions, our jealousies, our corruption. The world will *not* know.

Through the years, I have spoken of both of these things—the need for unity within the Church and the need to build a place to prepare. We have started The River of Life School in borrowed space that we have only for this year and next and which we have already outgrown. We have not yet been able to break ground at the Three Seas. God has been faithful to his word in that we would lack nothing on a personal level but He still has not provided the funds to build. It has been many years and we have wondered why it is taking so long. I have been calling the Church to unity throughout those years and everywhere I go, people all agree, nod their heads and pray diligently for this. I have seen several ways in which leaders are seeking to work together. I have heard others taking up this same message. I have seen the Holy Spirit at work. But, I still see that we have so far to go.

Two days ago I gave a lecture to a group of graduating seminarians on the need to love one another and to be of one heart and mind, on the need for the Church to be one. Following that, I had lunch with a prominent businessman and his wife to see if they would consider supporting this work. After lunch, I had a meeting with a well-known pastor to discuss the situation. The burden for unity was on my heart as I ate lunch with my friends. The businessman asked me if we had a sponsoring church and I answered that we did not, that, in fact, we really did not want one major sponsoring church but that many churches would come together to support this work. He said that would be good, especially from the point of view of a secular (though Christian) businessman. But, he also said that in Korea that would be difficult. I thought then of how we might well have been able to build the center by now if it were the primary work of a single large church.

After lunch, as I traveled to my next appointment, I thought over his words, “It would be difficult.” Once again, I felt the Lord speaking to me strongly. All of a sudden it all came together. My message of unity, my prayer for the Church to be one instead of for money and the work of preparing for the opening of North Korea became one message. God’s word was that He wants the Three Seas Center and The River of Life School to become a sign of the unity of the Church. The funds are to be provided by the churches of Korea together with no single church taking precedence—each giving as they could in accordance with their resources. My prayer for unity *was* a prayer for funding.

As the many different churches of Korea—all different denominations and traditions—join together in building this center, that will show to the world that there is unity of purpose and unity of heart. Only then will this school and center be able to serve as God intends—real preparation for the opening of North Korea.

When I met with the pastor a few minutes after this new revelation came to me, I poured out my heart to him. His response was, “We are to support this work with no strings attached and without publicity.” This was a strong confirmation to me for I could read his sincerity in his eyes. He also went on to say that he would be meeting with other pastors soon and would call on them to do the same.

So, with this new understanding of what God is doing and how He is doing it, I call on the churches of Korea to come together in a most practical and real way for the sake of the future of the Church, the nation, our families and the next generation to make the Three Seas Center and The River of Life School a reality—to fund this work, this year, this summer so that we can move forward, giving glory to God and showing the world our unity.

Every church that contributes to this work will have an entry in our roll call of honor as a demonstration of the unity of the church. We will give the church’s name and denomination in alphabetical order. There will be no special place or recognition for large or small donors. All are to give as they are able and as God guides. All contributions will be received with equal honor and gratitude. This list, and the center that is built, will serve as a sign of unity. May this be only the first of many more tangible signs all over this land as we attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God! (Eph. 4:13)

Ben Torrey
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