# A Step Nearer to Harmony Worship Service for Asian Heritage Month

May is Asian Heritage Month. I invite you to learn more about Asian culture and history with this liturgy and to bless the land of Asia and Asians who live in Canada. I am a Korean, and you can find some Korean theology, hymns and videos in this liturgy. As well, I hope you hold your heart in the prayer for Asia.

### Processional Video or Hymn

Kim YuNa, “Arirang” (Korean folk song), [www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8zxi\_yCOJ8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8zxi_yCOJ8)  
“To the High and Kindly Hills” (*More Voices* 129)

*Kim YuNa is a Korean figure skater who won the gold medal in women’s figure-skating at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics. “Arirang” is a traditional folk song of Korea.*

## We Prepare to Worship God

### Welcome and Announcements

### Lighting of the Christ Candle

As we light the Christ candle, may our stirring heart be quiet and feel your presence.

### Call to Worship

One: Wind is blowing  
from east, west, south, and north  
What is this wind?  
This is the wind of justice and righteousness,  
she reveals the sin that covers the earth  
and scatters oppressive powers like mere dust.

**All: Ul-ssi-goo, joh ta!**

One: This is the wind of life and breath of God,  
she liberates the oppressed from their deep Han.  
Let us sing for the day of Jubilee has arrived.

**All: Ul-ssi-goo, joh ta!**

One: This is the wind of peace,  
she makes us one in Christ  
and leads us to build harmony and peace.   
Let us praise God the Holy Spirit, and come into her presence.  
May we worship God in the Spirit and in truth. Amen.

*“Ul-ssi-goo, joh ta!” is Korean and used as a response of delight. It means “Hooray, it sounds great!”*

*Han is a Korean concept of frozen and knotted feelings of despair, helplessness, fear, anger, and other negative feelings that have accumulated over a period of time and remained within a person or a group.*

### Opening Prayer

**Gracious God,  
We are thankful to be here in your sanctuary.   
Please receive our worship and praise,  
and fill us with your joy.  
Empower us with your great Spirit   
so that we walk together with our siblings,  
who are longing for your justice and peace.   
In Jesus ’name we pray. Amen.**

### Opening Hymn

“Come Now, O God of Peace (O So So)” (VU 34)

### Prayer of Confession

**Gracious and Merciful God,  
at this time, we ask for your forgiveness.  
Although Jesus taught us to “love your neighbour as yourself,”  
we have not followed his words because of our selfishness   
and greed blinding our eyes.**

**Instead of showing love in Christ,   
we ignored and judged our siblings   
and we did not see or hear their tears and pain.**

**Although Jesus taught us to “forgive one another seventy times seven,”  
we did not follow his words because we were too stubborn,  
so our anger and resentment destroyed our soul.**

**Instead of following the way of peace in the Spirit,   
we fragmented apart, guided by our own purpose,  
and our actions destroyed the creation of God.  
O God, forgive us and renew us through your Holy Spirit.**

### Word of Assurance

Dear friends,  
do not be discouraged.  
Whoever trusts in Christ and confesses their sins to God  
is surrounded by God’s steadfast grace and love.  
Today is a new day in the Risen Christ!

### Passing of the Peace

### Children’s Time in Worship

Children’s Hymn: “Para, Para, Pitter Pat” (VU 309)

(*Bring some apples to show to the children.*)

The word “apology” in Korean is sa-gwa. The word sa-gwa has another meaning—it means “apple”! These days, Korean schools celebrate Apple Day. On this day you think of friends you have been not getting along with. Then you visit them to say sorry and fix your broken friendships.

In Matthew 5:21‒26, Jesus teaches the crowds that they have to repair their relationship with their siblings first before coming to worship God. Then the worship becomes the kind of genuine worship that pleases God.

It is not an embarrassing thing to say you’re sorry; you need great bravery to do it. May the Holy Spirit give you great courage so that you say sorry and build a good relationship with your friends.

#### Sunday School Activity after Children’s Time: Create an Apple Tree

Sunday school teachers can put branches in a large pot or planter. Place the pot in your activity room. Give the children apple-shaped paper cards. On the cards the children can write a letter to their friends share the ways that they are sorry and thankful. Then everyone hangs the cards on the tree.

### Scripture

Psalm 85 (VU 802)  
Ephesians 2:14‒18  
Matthew 5:21‒26

### Sermon: A Step Nearer to Harmony

*NB: This sermon includes statements about the Japanese occupation of Korea, 1910‒1945, including the Comfort Women who were raped by Japanese soldiers. You may wish to leave out graphic details.*

In May, the sun is warm and birds are singing between the green leaves on the branches of trees. We can look at flowers from our windows and enjoy the joy of spring. The month of May is ideally suited to celebrate as Asian Heritage Month, as people in Asia have frequently experienced peace collapse around them through colonialism or their own oppressive political situations, yet they consistently try to bloom like the flowers of independence, democracy, and coexistence within their own country and with other neighbouring countries.

In the passage of Matthew 5:21‒26 we read today, Jesus said that people need to reconcile first with their siblings before coming to make an offering to God.

Pondering Jesus’ message, I thought about my own vulnerability to follow him.

I grew up in South Korea hearing about how my grandparents and their generation experienced terrible suffering during the time of Japanese military occupation of Korea from 1910 to 1945. I heard that the Korean language was forbidden to use in school and the workplace, and that Koreans were encouraged to adopt Japanese names. The most brutal story above all, however, was the story of the Comfort Women: teenage girls who were kidnapped and forced into sexual slavery by the Imperial Japanese military at that time. They were sent to various parts of Asia and raped up to 40 times a day by the Japanese soldiers.

When the war ended and these women returned to Korea, they hid the atrocities they had suffered so as not to shame their families. They held this secret until South Korea’s U.S.-backed dictatorship was overthrown in 1988. Throughout the 1990s more and more of the Comfort Women came forward, most of them now grandmothers. They shared the unspeakable horrors that were committed against them in the Occupation Era.

The women came forward to demand an apology from the Japanese government, which instead claimed that these women were merely prostitutes. Now most of the Comfort Women are over 90 years-old; as of this writing there are only 22 of them left. The governments of South Korea and Japan attempted to sweep this issue under the rug so as not to damage Korean‒Japanese relations, and a sincere conversation about a restitution of justice for these women has never occurred. There continues to be a deep-rooted hostility among the Korean and Japanese people because of the many unresolved issues from the occupation, yet the issue of the Comfort Women inflames the greatest passion.

Due to this historical background, I recognize that I also have prejudice and hostility toward the Japanese people in my innermost heart.

I was ordained within the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (KiJang PROK) and sought admission to the Order of Ministry of The United Church of Canada. In Korea I had very little exposure to Japanese people, so my prejudices were not challenged. However, my life and ministry in Canada have allowed me to meet and work with Japanese people in the United Church: Dr. Kathy Yamashita and the Rev. Kyoko Miura.

I met Kathy Yamashita at the final meeting of Alberta & Northwest Conference in May 2018. As President of the Conference, she led the meeting with outstanding leadership and wonderful humour. I was so impressed by her.

When Kathy visited our presbytery in her capacity as Conference President, she shared with us her own family’s story during the meeting. I learned that Japanese-Canadians suffered persecution during World War II; they were placed in internment camps and had their property taken from them. It was a story I had never heard before.

I became acquainted with the Rev. Kyoko in a class I took for my continuing education. In the class, she and I were the only Asians among 15 other students. Whether she knew my buried prejudice toward Japanese people or not, she visited with me every breaktime and lunchtime. Ironically, she was the only one who showed me that much kindness. I slowly opened my heart from politeness to friendship. Through this experience, I considered how Asians in Canada need to cooperate with one another rather than hold on to the grudges of the past.

So it became a new challenge for me to overcome my own prejudice, and where it actually came from. To open my mind and make harmony with Japanese people today, despite the wrong actions of people in the past or our governments today, and to live out Christ’s commandment to become reconciled with our neighbours as presented to us in Matthew 5:21‒26. It is not easy. I may need to fight hard against the stereotypes that I grew up with all around me in South Korea.

Upon beginning ministry in a rural area of Alberta, I noticed that there is a much deeper rift between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians than I had thought. I heard the comments from non-Indigenous people in my community: “How long should we apologize? Why don’t Indigenous people get over it?”

I am a newcomer to Canada, and it is perhaps unwise to suggest I have any answers to this very complex situation. However, I can understand these difficult feelings through my own experience. In Korea, we call these unresolved feelings of despair and anger *Han.* It is not easy.

So I pray to God for this land of Canada. May the Holy Spirit open our hearts to listen to one another’s story, and may the wind of peace blow also to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people so that they look at each other with the eyes of peace and the heart of forgiveness. Amen.

### Hymn

“With the Wings of Our Mind” (VU 698)

### Minute for Mission

### Call to Offering

*While offering is being collected, show video or play hymn:*

Song So-Hee: “Beautiful Land, Korea,” [www.youtube.com/watch?v=0XkJDN0BKJg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0XkJDN0BKJg)  
“Never Ending Joy” (MV 40)

### Prayer of Dedication

Caring God,   
thank you for your blessings in our life.  
Your love overflows and wets our hearts.  
We also share what we received by you,  
and hope this offering wets the hearts of others with love.

*In Korean, the idiom of having a “wet heart”**means to be overcome with emotion.*

### Prayers of the People

O Living God,   
We give you thanks to celebrate this month as Asian Heritage Month,  
to remember the contribution of Asian people to the mosaic of your world.  
You blessed the continent with glorious civilizations in their long history,   
the birthplace of agriculture, built up by its fertile lands and life-giving waters:  
the Tigris and Euphrates, the Indus and Ganges, the Yangtze and Mekong, the Han and the Jordan, in which your child Jesus was baptized.  
From the northern steppes to the mighty Himalayas,   
from the Mediterranean to the Pacific Ocean,   
Asia is a land rich with diversity.

We think of our own heritage, and the ways it has shaped us in becoming the people we are today. We give thanks that all of us may offer that part of ourselves to one another, and to see one another as God does, as one human family.

We pray for those who have come to our country from Asia as immigrants,  
seeking new opportunities for a better life.  
We give thanks for the entrepreneurial spirit many Asians bring with them to Canada.  
As they grow and flourish along with us, we pray that Asian-Canadians born in Canada would remember the struggles of the generations who came before them and that they would value their Asian heritage, as we also value each of our own forebears and the cultural heritage we inherited from them.

May the hostilities of our former nations be forgotten. Open us to one another to create harmony between us, whether we are Indigenous, White, Black, or Asian.

We pray for those who serve in ministry in the United Church who are Asian.  
May they breathe new vitality into the United Church from their various experiences and cultures. Give them wisdom when they serve both Canadian and Asian immigrant congregations.

O God, we pray for those who have come to Canada as Temporary Foreign Workers. We pray also for those who are migrant workers in Asia who face even more brutal exploitation.

We pray for women and children in Asia and around the world, who work in oppressive conditions to produce the goods we enjoy in Canada.

We pray for anyone who is held back from reaching their fullest potential.

In its recent history, many of Asia’s nations have experienced war and dictatorship.  
O God, you were present with the oppressed and became their hope.  
They joined together in solidarity and shouted for justice and peace.  
We pray for those who still struggle to achieve justice and peace in their land.

We pray, O God, for those we know who are sick, those who are in need of the healing touch of your Holy Spirit. We remember those battling depression or addictions.

We pray for our own selves, our own hidden hurts that only you know. Give peace to our troubled hearts and strength to face the coming week. We gather these and all our prayer as one in the words Jesus taught us to pray by saying:

### The Lord’s Prayer

### Closing Hymn

“May the Love of the Lord” (MV 218)

### Sending Forth

As you go from this place of sabbath rest,Embody the good news!  
Let people know the love of God, the peace of Christ,   
and the power of the Holy Spirit.

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