

On the mind of the Rev. Dr. Nathaniel Jung-Chul Lee...

This weekend, I'm away at the Episcopal Asian-American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Leaders Retreat at Trinity Cathedral in Portland, Oregon. A day in, it has already been a wonderful time.

The Episcopal Church is woefully behind most Christian denominations in terms of its racial diversity--the second least racially diverse denomination in America--and nowhere is that lack of diversity more evident than in the lack of AAPI representation in its leadership. A recent PEW Research poll highlighted that the Asian-American population in the Episcopal Church is a "null set"--a number so low it is statistically unregistrable. What that means, for most AAPI Episcopalians, is having to live with a profound sense of "otherness" in a place--namely, the church--that should feel like home. That is a hard reality to live with on a day to day basis. But being here offers a different sort of experience--a space of belonging. It has been healing to share stories of our shared experience, and find that, though we are few, we are not alone.

Those of you who know me at all know that I can talk forever about questions of racial justice and identity, and especially, how Asian-American identity can and should inform those questions. After all, I wrote my Ph.D. on those issues! However, today, I'm wondering a little bit more about the spaces--the times or the places--where *you* all have been made to feel "other." The Asian-American experience is unique. The feeling of being "outside of belonging" is not. And as I've been exploring my own experience--and in particular, how that experience has impacted my relationship to God and the church--I couldn't help, as your pastor, but wonder about how that's been for you.

Our speaker--the Rev. Dr. KyungJa (KJ) Oh--began her talk on Thursday morning by singing a song. I wonder if I can share it with you. She sang it for us three times, inviting us to join her as the tune became familiar.

*How could anyone ever tell you you were anything less than beautiful?
How could anyone ever tell you you were less than whole?
How could anyone fail to notice that your loving is a miracle
How deeply you're connected to my soul*

The last time we sang it, she invited us to imagine God was singing these words to us. And I can tell you, there was not a dry eye in the room....

I don't know what your particular situation is. I hope you have never felt the pain and the grief of exclusion or rejection. My guess is that you have. My guess is that there have been times in your life when a person or a people made you feel like you or some part of you was not loveable. My guess is that you know what it's like to feel like you have to hide some part of yourself to be accepted. I imagine for some of you that this has even led you to hate those parts of yourself. And I wonder how that has impacted your identity and your relationships--especially, your relationship with God. I wonder if you've ever felt like what you have to bring is just not good enough, and that true intimacy--an intimacy that connects to your deepest, darkest, or most hidden parts--is beyond the realm of possibility.

If that's you today, then beloved of God, hear the good news of the Gospel. The God who created all things also knit you together in your mother's womb, and declares that you are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:13-14). *You are beautiful*. God has in Jesus Christ taken all the brokenness of sin and death into his own body on the cross, and now declares: *You are holy, you are whole*. (1 Thess. 5:23-24; MSG). And the God who *is* love (1 John 4:7)--*perfect love*--has, through the power of the Holy Spirit poured out his own love into our hearts so that we may love as God loves (Rom. 5:5). *Your loving is, quite literally, divine--a miracle*.

God made you, God sees you, and God knows you--every part of you. And God loves you--every part of you. You are *fully* known, and *fully* loved--*even to the deepest part of your soul*. And you are not--you are *never*--alone.

TODAY AFTER CHURCH

Visitors are invited to pick up a welcome bag at the back of the church following the service. All are welcome to Coffee Hour in the Parish House at 12:15 p.m.

12:30 to 1:15 p.m. Join us in the Parish Living Room for a "sermon talkback" with today's preacher, the Rev. Adrian Dannhauser. This will be a time when you can ask questions, give feedback, and help us all to deepen the conversation that the sermon has only just begun. Talkbacks will continue through the season of Easter.

COMMON CHORD CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

Pledges keep climbing for the Common Chord capital campaign for restoration of the organ. As of today, the total is **\$652,850!** Will you help us reach our \$800,000 goal with a pledge to the campaign? Pledges are payable over three years. Pick up a campaign brochure and pledge card in the Narthex or go to givingsites.com/commonchord to learn more.

EASTERTIDE DANCE PARTY

Thursday, April 25, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. This Easter season, our monthly “Third Thursday” gathering—which follows Candlelight Communion—will be a dance party! Scripture often talks about dancing as a way of showing our joy before the Lord. So, join us in the Assembly Hall for a night to remember. We’ll have some food, some music, and lots of time to mingle. The Rev. Adrian Dannhauser will get us started with a Jewish circle dance. "Let them praise his name with dancing!" (Psalm 149:3)

MOTHERS OF BEDFORD – REGISTER TODAY!

Wednesday, May 1, 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. Join us for an exclusive evening of cinema and discussion with the screening of the powerful documentary *Mothers of Bedford*, followed by a Q&A session with the director, Jenifer McShane, an alumna of Incarnation Camp.

This event not only showcases an important social issue—motherhood in prison—but also supports a meaningful cause. All proceeds will support Incarnation Camp scholarships, including for children of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women through Hour Children, a faith-based nonprofit organization and partner in mission of Church of the Incarnation. The cost is \$50 per person, and you can register at incarnationcenter.org/mothers-of-bedford. A catered reception begins at 6:00 p.m. in the Parish House. The film screening begins at 6:30 p.m. in the Assembly Hall.

ICE CREAM SOCIAL AND AFTERNOON TEA

Saturday, May 4, 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. All are invited to the Parish House for a time of fellowship and an update on Incarnation's Common Chord capital campaign for restoration of the organ. We’ll have tea party classics, from scones to sandwiches, and all the fixings for ice cream sundaes. We hope everyone who loves Incarnation will participate in the campaign and join us for the festivities!

20s/30s MIDTOWN ROOFTOP GATHERING

Sunday, May 5, 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. A member of Incarnation’s 20s/30s Group has offered the rooftop of their apartment building – The Oriana, 420 E 54th Street – for young adults to gather for some springtime fellowship. There will be food and some themed activities. RSVP to the Rev. Dr. Nate Lee (nlee@churchoftheincarnation.org). We look forward to seeing you then!

EVERY WEEK AT INCARNATION

Sunday Bible Study: Bible Study is held in the Parish House from 10:00 to 10:30 a.m.

Sunday School and Nursery Care for Children: During the 11:00 a.m. service, children ages 3 to 9 (pre-K through 4th grade) depart the service with their teacher for Sunday School in the Parish House. Nursery care is provided in the Parish House from 10:45 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. Learn more about Family Ministries at Incarnation, including offerings for older children, on the church website.

Wednesday Holy Eucharist: Join us each Wednesday at 12:15 p.m. for this Rite I spoken service of Holy Eucharist, which includes a brief homily, organ music, and healing prayer with holy oil.

Thursday Candlelight Communion: Join us each Thursday at 6:15 p.m. for Candlelight Communion, a service of Holy Eucharist that incorporates chant and silence as well as elements of contemporary worship. This service is informal and contemplative, with music led by a cantor and a brief reflection by one of the clergy. You can also stream this service at youtube.com/churchoftheincarnation.

Daily Office: Services of Morning Prayer and Compline are held via Zoom. To view the weekly schedule, go to churchoftheincarnation.org/worship.