

In remembrance of the tragedy of the Sewol Ferry



April 29, 2017 at Mokpo new Port, South Korea

On the last Saturday of April 2017, Mokpo new port, it was severely windy. The remains of the Sewol Ferry that had been submerged for the past three years was devastating. However, what was even more devastating were the faces and hearts of the family members waiting for the 9 victims that remain unfound. Eun-mi Park was one of the family members: Eun-mi Park's daughter, Da-yoon Huh, was in 11th grade at Danwon High School at that time, and she is one of the 9 unfound. What makes matters worse is that Eun-mi Park has a growing tumor in her head that needs to be treated.



Eun-mi Park(left) and Joy Kim

Joy Kim, Pastor Chan Kim's wife, met Eun-mi Park on April 29th at a station designated for those waiting for their loved ones to be found. She delivered the letters and donations (\$2,560.00) along with words of encouragement.

The donation funds were raised through selling Cakes and cookies at an ongoing bake sale event that was held April 1st - 15th, and at the 'Remembrance of Sewol Ferry' meeting at the Iowa City Korean UMC on April 15th, a day before Easter Sunday, which was also the third memorial day for the incident.

I, Chan Gok Kim, am one of these people, and I am serving as a pastor at the Korean United Methodist Church in Iowa City and have been since October 2014.

At the time when the Sewol Ferry sank, I was with my wife at a guesthouse run by Banyam Theological Seminary



Chan Kim(front-center) with students at Banyam Theological seminary, Nigeria

(BTS) in United Methodist Church in Nigeria. Starting from September 2013, it was then our second semester as volunteer missionaries teaching BTS students. Then one day, Pastor John Pena, who was a provost at the seminary came up to me and said, "A ferry in Korea has sunk, and your prime minister has resigned." When I first heard what he said, I did think to myself, "Why would the prime minister resign because a ferry sank?" but otherwise didn't make much of the incident. It was partially because the internet connection in Nigeria was bad and I had no other ways to hear about the Sewol Ferry incident, but mostly because a larger problem was on my mind. It was the final stage of a six month long dry season. My wife and I would look up to the West sky everyday and desperately yearn for

rain. There was even a more critical issue. An armed Islamist group, Boko Haram, continued to reek reckless terrorism. The kidnapped 276 teen girls from Chibok (Borno, Nigeria) that was about 350 miles north from our BTS seminary (Taraba, Nigeria), just two days before the Sewol Ferry fiasco. The Boko Haram terrorism was indescribably terrible. It was only after I returned to the States later on that year I learned in detail about the ferry tragedy through online news. As days would pass, the more I would wonder what caused the ferry accident, and the fear from Boko Haram encompassed me.

The Sewol Ferry was a coastal liner affiliated with Cheonghaejin transport, which was headed to Jeju Island from Incheon. There were 476 passengers onboard, including 324 students going on a field trip from Danwon High School. The ferry made its first distress call at 8:58 AM, April 16, 2014, and completely submerged on April 18th, 2014. 304 people lost their lives from this accident, 9 of which bodies still remain undiscovered. After the incident, the police and government, who were responsible for the rescue of these people floundered about and weren't able to save the passengers. Half of the 172 passengers that were saved before the ferry sank, were by fishing boats and civilian ships that arrived at the scene about 40 minutes later than the coast guards. As the ferry sank, the media reported fake news that all of the passengers had been rescued.

The captain and crew were the first to abandon the ship and escape. Even though the passengers, who were in survival vests, had the opportunity to escape, the captain and crew members did not pass the order to escape. Instead, they told everyone to stay. The lives of most of the passengers, including the students from Danwon high school that followed these orders were lost. There was nothing to be heard from the president, Park Geun-hae, from the start of the incident to 5 PM of that day. The actions of the president continued to be suspicious, and when the families of the deceased and citizen campaign groups requested truth commission, the government declined. It wasn't until March 2017 when President Park was impeached, almost three years after the incident, that the ferry was brought back up to the surface. They are currently investigating the interior of the Sewol Ferry to find the missing victims including Da-yoon.



Around 2 PM, April 15th, Korean people started to gather: students, teachers, professors, stay at home moms, and pastors. Pleasant, friendly faces. Although their faces seemed happy and smiled, they were crying on the inside! At this memorial event, we had a time for silent prayer for the Sewol Ferry victims, and then we watched videos on the Sewol Ferry incident, and also about Da-yoon, the young victim who we were donating to. Everyone's eyes were filled with tears. And then we recited clause 4.16 , the Declaration of Human Rights to Dignity and

Safety, which states that everyone, including Koreans, have the right to be protected from accidents and disasters. We ended the meeting with Pastor Barrie Tritle's (First UMC, Iowa City) benediction.

The third memorial day of this tragedy falls on this Easter, April, 16. If resurrected Jesus was to visit Korea today, where would He first go? Wouldn't it be the Sewol Ferry, which has decomposed in the sea for the past three years? Wouldn't it be the families of the deceased, still in pain? On this memorial day of remembering the Sewol Ferry tragedy that happened three years ago, we will hold this event to honor and act upon the bible's word to mourn with the mourning (Romans 12:15). We hope to be at least a small bit of comfort to the families and those that have lost so much through this horrific incident. We wish that the truth on why the ferry sank and why so many innocent lives were not rescued will come forth.

We desperately pray for her and her family as we prepare for this event. I hope that the nine unfound, including Da-yoon, return to the arms of their families! And also, I hope for God's comfort for those all over the world who are in pain and have been hurt. Like Christ's resurrection!



Da-yoon Huh