

FIRST AND CENTER

Pastor's Blog

April 27, 2018

I thought about doing a blog post called "What I did on my trip to Korea," but I decided instead to think about what I *learned* on my trip to Korea. Here are a few quick reflections as I continue to work through the haze of jet lag from a 13-hour time change!



- The sharing of food is a spiritual activity. Well, duh, you might say, you already knew that, because one of the centers of Christian spirituality is the Lord's Supper! But I'm talking about the sharing of food outside of worship. We ate so much food, and so much good food! Our hosts delighted in showing us new kinds of food, and our willingness to try delighted them as well. Not assuming we could use chopsticks well, we were often offered forks as a sign of hospitality. Food became a way of sharing a culture, so much more than nurturing the body. In Korea, everyone eats off the serving plates, which brings people closer together in such interesting ways. Eating there is decidedly a communal enterprise, not an individual one, which says a lot about the culture as a whole. I could talk all day about the food!
- Differences in languages are not insurmountable barriers to communication. My first host spoke almost no English. Google Translate helps but has some serious limitations (one day it translated her statement as "now you are going to go suck," which is not what she meant, I think). Yet, not only did we manage, she taught me to make a basic Korean dish (kimbab) mostly by showing me. We bonded, without words, such that I did not want to leave her at the end of my two nights in her home! Without words to distract, sometimes you can go deeper.
- In a corollary to that, worship is worship, even if you can't understand the language of worship. An elder prayed with such heartfelt emotion that I was drawn to tears, though I have no idea what she said. Singers energetically lifted up praise and I felt uplifted! By carefully listening and watching the monitor with the words and music projected on it, I figured out what the letters were for Jesus (or Jesu as they say) and so, could sing it every time it appeared. Paying attention makes a difference in worship.
- The world is full of beauty. Seoul at night from Namsan Tower. Haeundae Beach in Busan. Parks in both cities. A botanical garden in Seongnam, where tulips lined a huge bed. Cherry trees. People's faces. Small children. Rice fields. The Han river.

What a blessing. It will take more than three days to process all of this, but here is a start. May you find blessings in surprising places in your life.

~ The Rev. Shelly Stackhouse
Transitional Pastor