

Dare to imagine God's embrace
Luke 1:67-79
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In the last few months, there have been some words that became the talk of the town. One of them is Covid-19 or the Omicron variant. The other word that captured me was Squid Game on Netflix. I have not watched it because I don't enjoy violent scenes, but since this Korean tv show became so popular all over the world, I often read articles that analyze the reason why Squid Game went viral. These writers explain that even though it is a fiction, it reflects the reality of our world. In the tv show, hundreds of vulnerable people who are in poverty fight to the death in a series of children's games in hopes of winning a cash prize of \$38 million. If they lose the game, they will die. The participants are people who are in desperate situation such as a business man with huge amount of debt, a migrant worker who was exploited, a girl who was abandoned by her family, a North Korean refugee, and an elder who suffers from brain tumor. They first declined to join the game because of its cruelty but later, they decided to join it after realizing that they have no hope in their lives. Many journalists pointed out that it became popular because people can sympathize with those actors as we live in highly competitive and capitalistic society. One of CNN opinions said that Americans are so obsessed with Squid Game because it mirrors the unfair and unpredictable nature of life. People fight for better wage, suffer from medical debt, and migrant workers are very often exploited. This reality pushes people to join the game of opportunity and success in their daily lives. This reality does not seem like it is only in Korea or the US. It is a global phenomenon.

We are living in an unfair, unpredictable, and even cruel world. One day, I woke up in the middle of the night and thought of the people around me including my family members and friends near and far. Then, I felt deep pain because most of us are suffering from our own issues like financial difficulty, debt, addiction, emotional distress, marital conflicts, burnout, chronic disease, cancer, and the loss of our loved ones. It seems like

hell-like world is the reality that human beings are facing today. As I get older, I see more people suffering and that makes me feel really sad. Squid Game, the dystopia is everywhere. On that night, the only prayer I was able to say was, “Lord, save us. Save us. Please cover each person who is suffering with your arm.” I yearned for God’s embrace.

In this dark moment, I read Luke chapter 1 and asked myself, “was the situation in the time of Jesus better than us?” I don’t think so. Herod king showed the cruelty of that era by killing all baby boys under 2. The situation was much worse than Squid Game. Political and religious leaders exploited poor people. Peasants lived in an oppressive society. The people of Israel were under the colonization of Roman Empire for a long time. It was the dark world. In this situation, angel Gabriel visited two people, Zechariah and Mary, and told them a shocking good news, which never happened in the history. Yes, the news was that two women are going to have babies in a mysterious way. Zechariah’s wife was too old and Mary was a virgin. Since I had difficulty to have a baby, I understand how the news is shocking. However, the news was not just about unbelievable pregnancy. It was the news that the Saviour is coming, and the Saviour will save us from this hell-like situation. It was way more good news than winning \$38 million.

This news was so mind-blowing that the well-educated and righteous priest could not understand it and asked, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.” Right after questioning the angel, he became silent and not able to speak until the day his son arrives. The Gabriel muted him because he did not believe the news. Zechariah heard the most important and the greatest news, but was not able to accept it. The news was not real for him at that moment, consequently, he was not able to spread the news.

Mary, a young woman, was also afraid and shocked, but the bible emphasizes her answer. She said “I am the Lord’s servant, may your word to me be fulfilled.” To Mary, the good news became reality. She accepted and embodied it. She ran to Elizabeth, and praised God. Her famous Magnificat is written in Luke chapter 1. The praise is not only

about what God has done to Mary, but it describes more about how God's salvation looks like. She said, "God's mercy extends to those who fear God from generation to generation. God has performed mighty deeds with God's arm; God has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. God has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. God has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. God has helped God's servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as God promised our ancestors." Mary praised that God is going to make things right and bring justice and peace to this world. To achieve this peace, it does not require people to be the winner of the game. It does not ask people to win over others because this peace is not just for one winner, but for everyone. This peace will come to us in a totally different way from what we have experienced in this world. Mary proclaimed God's salvation, the perfect vision of shalom, as she was holding the baby Jesus in her womb. With fear and awe, she dared to imagine God's embrace.

Then, what happened to Zechariah? We don't know what he did for 40 weeks of pregnancy while he could not speak at all. I just imagine that in the deep silence, he might have prayed, read the bible and meditated it again and again. As soon as he was able to speak, he was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke prophecy. In his prophecy, he said, "God is going to save us, God is going to save us, we are going to be saved. My son John, go and prepare the way. God is going to lead us to shalom." Finally, on that day, as he held his new born baby John, Zechariah was able to proclaim the good news and God's salvation. He said, "Such is the tender mercy of our God who from on high will bring the Rising Sun to visit us, to give light to those who live in darkness and the shadow of death and to guide our feet into the way of peace."

People of Israel was sitting in darkness and the shadow of death. As the world enjoys watching Squid Game, it sadly reflects the reality we are sitting in. It is dark, depressing, and hopeless. Ironically, in these dark moments, we got these new babies, new generation. This reality leads us desperately yearn for the peace that the baby Jesus brought, brings and will bring. Jesus fed the hunger, set the oppressed free, healed the

wounded, forgave sin, redeemed and embraced all human beings. There is no better good news than this, there is no better salvation than this. This is way better than winning the game. As Mary did and as Zechariah did 40 weeks later, it is our turn to dare to imagine God's embrace. Only when we can imagine it, only when we can experience it, we can spread the good news to this new generation. I pray this new generation may also experience God's embrace.