

The GATHERING

"Do not be afraid, for I am with you, I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west"

—Isaiah 43:5-7

Weary and Persistent Hope

My mother-in-law, Miyoung Park, was born in 1942 near Pyongyang, Korea, before the peninsula was divided. Her father was a teacher and an underground freedom fighter against Japanese colonial rule. When she was seven, one of his students came to their home and said, "Teacher, please come with me. It will not take long." She remembers her father stepping out the door and never coming back.



Image: Miyoung Park with her husband and two sons, Hyun and Kyung Hur (1983)

A year later, when the Korean War broke out in 1950, her family fled south, carrying the piercing grief that even if her father returned, they would not be there to welcome him. Seventy-five years later and without an official peace treaty, millions of families are still divided. Sometimes my mother-in-law chuckles and says that her *abuhji* might be alive somewhere. In that laugh, I hear the longing of a child still waiting to be gathered into the embrace of her father.

In this Advent season, I remember the many families near and far who are suffering from separation and longing to hold each other. I cling to the promise of a God who gathers, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. Our God does not forget those scattered by war, by borders, or by detention cells and policies that tear families apart.

So I light a candle for the God who gathers from east and west, who calls to the north and south: *Give them back. Do not detain them.* I light a candle for families divided long ago and those separated even now, that their spirits may be renewed as they wait with weary but persistent hope of coming together someday. And I light a candle for our communities of faith, that we may vigil together through times of long waiting.

Prayer

Merciful God, hear the cries of your children who are separated from their loved ones this season. May your promise and presence sustain us as we wait expectantly for you to gather us again. Amen.

