

Why Asian and Asian American Woman's Theology Matters to All of Us

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[0 : 0 0] Greetings to Table Church. Thank you so much for inviting me. To Reverend Toneta Landis Anna, thank you so much for extending this invitation to be part of your church and to share a little bit about my latest book, Invisible.

I wrote it in part to make it a lens through which other communities can understand their own context and their own situations.

The book is called Invisible because that is how many Asian Americans feel. When I speak about this book in many contexts, I never have to explain the title to an Asian American community, but because it is a common reality that we face as immigrants, as 6th or 7th or 8th generation Americans here.

So it doesn't matter how long we have been here on this land. In many ways, we become invisible. So it is one thing to wish to become invisible.

I think in some TV shows, there might be a supernatural power that you can put a cloak on and become invisible. But it is another thing to be made invisible.

[1 : 3 3] So I'm hoping that my book would just be a lens for other marginalized groups to understand their own oppression and their situations. When we look at the LGBTQ community, we know that their issues are made invisible.

When we look at other immigrants here in this country, whether they are refugees, political refugees, climate refugees, economic refugees, their issues, or them as a community are made invisible.

So it's not that Asian Americans are the only groups that are made invisible, but others are. And that's why when we come to the table, I love the name of your church, The Table Church.

When we come to the table, we want to hear as many voices and we need to allow as many voices to come to the table to help us get a deeper understanding of who God is and who we are ourselves.

By understanding each other, by getting into a deeper understanding of Asian American theology, we can get a deeper sense of African Americans, of Latinx, Hispanic, Native Americans, queer, and other groups.

[3 : 0 4] Because these different theologies becomes a lens for us to understand one another. So Asian American theology is important.

And we know that May is AAPI Heritage Month where we celebrate what Asian Americans have been able to contribute to society. We have scientists, artists, athletes, and theologians too.

So there is much to celebrate. And each group of people, each ethnic group, each large allies group have so much to contribute to give us all a deeper understanding of God.

One of the things with Asian American theology is that our issues are made invisible. And why is that? It's because of different factors.

One of them is racism here in the U.S. is talked about in black and white terms. So if you're not black and white, and then your issues kind of fall in between the cracks.

[4 : 18] So if you're Latinx or Native American, Asian American, our issues of racism are ignored or they fall in between the cracks.

Whenever I talk about racism or share my stories of experiences of racism, a lot of white people say, well, that's not racist because you're almost white.

So Asian Americans have been labeled in different terms. One of them is honorific whites. That only reinforces white supremacy because it really shows that there's a hierarchy of people and whites are at the top.

And white people continue to tell Asian Americans, you're almost white. You're honorific whites. So whatever experiences that you experience cannot be racism.

There's also a myth called model minority myth. And that was a myth used by sociologists in the 1960s. And it was placed on Asian Americans.

[5 : 34] And what essentially it was doing was pitting us against other ethnic groups, other marginalized groups. So the narrative was, only if you work just as hard as Asian Americans, you will go to the top schools.

You will make enough money. You will become the richest people. Okay. All those myths were told so that it pitted Asian Americans against the Native Americans, African Americans, the Latinx community.

Because what white people were saying was, if you work just as hard as the African Americans, then you will go to the top schools.

But we know it's a myth because Asian Americans are not all smart, are not all rich, can't get into the top schools, don't have the best jobs.

There's so many poor Asian Americans living in various parts around the country. We don't all go to the top schools.

[6 : 48] We're not all succeeding. So it's important that we get rid of such myths. Because what it does is, it makes people of color fight and build tension against one another.

So we need to eliminate those things that have been put in place by those in power. Asian American theology wants to show some of these difficulties that Asian Americans face.

And want to show that there are different ways of doing theology. By the last 2,000 years of our church history, of our Christian theology history, it has been done by white heterosexual men from Europe.

So all of our perspective of who God is and who Jesus is and who the Holy Spirit is, is through that lens of white male heterosexuals living in Europe.

and their lens is very narrow. And it has created a male God, a white God, a kingly God, a sovereign God, and has really perpetuated whiteness and maleness.

[8 : 21] And so now that we have feminist theologians, black theologians, Hispanic theologians, Native American theologians, and Asian American theologians, everyone coming to the table can bring new perspective about God.

You see, all of us at the church and in other faith communities, we're all finite. Our minds are limited. Our brains are limited.

We cannot comprehend or fully understand the fullness of God because God is infinite. Even a male white theologian have said, if you think that is who God is, then that is not God.

So as Christians, we are on this journey to figure out who God is for us. And that's why it's important to hear Asian American theologians because we bring different things to the table just as black theologians and African American theologians and Hispanic and Native American and queer, disabled, all of these different theologians, post-colonial theologians, they bring new things to the table.

And so I began my talk by talking about how Asian Americans are made invisible. So in my book of Invisible, I work towards a theology of visibility.

[9 : 56] And I'm hoping that other communities, other people of faith who feel that they have been marginalized, made invisible, or their issues have been pushed under the rug as if it doesn't matter to who they are, that this theology of visibility will be helpful for you, may become a tool for you to become the full human being that God has created you to be.

So there are four terms that I introduce, and because this is a short talk, I'll just briefly name them. And if you're interested, I know some people in your church are reading it together.

You can join the group or read it on your own. But there are four things I want to introduce for Asian American theology. One word is called Uri.

So in Korea, we use the term Uri. In English, it means our. So in Korea, because it is a communal society, we don't talk about my church, we say our church.

We don't say my mom, we say our mom, even though you may be the only child. We talk in plural terms. We talk in communal identity, which really then becomes helpful for us to understand the Trinitarian God, to understand that we need one another within this body of Christ.

[11 : 28] We are not an island to ourselves, but we need the community. We need a faith community. We need this table church to come together to worship, to learn, to serve God.

The second term that I introduce is Han. Han is a term in Korean and it can be translated as unjust suffering. When there are systems set up to cause suffering, such as homophobia, sexism, patriarchy, racism, that causes Han.

It causes unjust suffering. And part of our walk with Christ is to be liberated from this Han. The third term is Chang, which can be translated as sticky love.

When you put your finger in a jar of honey and you take it out, it becomes all sticky. That's the kind of love that many Koreans talk about with our brothers and sisters, with our friends, with our parents.

And that gives a deeper understanding of our love for God and for one another. It's inseparable. Even though you may have an argument with your best friend, this Chang brings you together.

[12 : 51] That's the Chang that Koreans love to talk about. and when we bring it into the Christian realm, it really expands our understanding of love. Our English language is so limited that we use Greek words for love.

We need other languages for love. The fourth term is Chi. I think many of you have heard of the word Chi, as in the word Tai Chi, Reiki, Qigong.

In Asia, it means energy. It means wind and breath and spirit. The same things as Ruha in the Old Testament and Nupa in the New Testament.

Spirit. The spirit of God. And when we have these different words for the spirit of God, it gives us a deeper understanding of who God is. Chi is an embodied understanding of spirit.

that God is within us. The spirit is within us, within you, in each, all of us. And that makes a big difference in how we treat the other, how we treat our brothers and sisters in the congregation, how we treat our family, how we treat our colleagues and co-workers.

[14 : 07] So I'm hoping these four terms, Uri, Chi, Han, and Chong will help you in your own theological journey.

As you struggle, whatever it may be, economic, our gender identity, our sexual identity, our racial identity, whatever it may be, our ableism, our inability, whatever it is that makes you invisible, that perhaps this theology of visibility will be a helpful method, a helpful tool for you in your theological journey, in your Christian journey, in your faith journey.

Because it's not an easy one. There are so many obstacles. And I hope that this table church will continue to nourish you and challenge you, empower you to do the work of God.

thank you again so much for this kind invitation for me to come to share with you on this Sunday. May all of God's blessing be poured upon you and the church and all your ministers and your ministerial team.

Many blessings.