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### The Peace in Walking

I walked in the scorching, humid summer heat of South Korea for what seemed like hours upon hours. From sunrise to sunset, we walked on the dirt path with the fence of the DMZ to my right. I questioned myself *why I was doing this? What was the point of walking along Korea's DMZ?* My body cried to stop, with every step there was a shot to my legs. *This program was supposed to be about the reunification of North and South Korea! How was walking supposed to do that?*

The barbed wire fence stood over me as I helplessly walked with everyone else. Every time I leaned against the fence, the blistering wires burned my sweaty skin. The classic question, "are we there yet?" must have gone through my mind thousands of times. All I could think about was the dinner waiting for me, and how pointless this was. After the sun began to set, and just when I assumed everyone would stop, I heard singing. I turned around and to my surprise, about ten people all with a grin on their faces were holding hands and singing a song that echoed in the vast countryside. A few minutes later, people next to me slowly started to join in. It was vexatious at first, but since everyone else was doing it, I reluctantly did as well. As we started to sing, the pain started to ameliorate and it was replaced by a peace that I never expected. A step was not painful, the heat was not suffocating, and the lethargy vanished. Instead, I was at peace. I was not sure why, but I was. This experience carved a path for me to later understand the correlation between what seems like the simple act of walking and peace. I understood through the years that not only our walking is for peace, but walking itself is an act of peace. Walking is what allows for such a beautiful thing to blossom.

The division of Korea has produced many detrimental outcomes. It caused there to be split families, the lack of human rights in the North, and not only the physical barrier,

but the ideological opposition in South Korea concerning the phobia of communism. All of these awful outcomes from the division in the Korean Peninsula. And, how was the act of walking supposed to help with this?

Walking is what most people do on a daily basis. It is one of the epitomes of basic human action. A baby first learns to crawl, then balance themselves standing, and finally, walks. A little girl walks to her dad; it is peaceful. A man in love walks to his beautiful girlfriend; it is peaceful. We walk to our friends; it is peaceful. We, however, do not walk to our enemy, rather we charge; it is not peaceful. Only when there is peace, one can walk to the other. As Rebecca Solnit stated within a preface from the Korean translated version of her book, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, "걸어가는 사람이 바늘이고 걸어가는 길이 실이라면, 걷는 일은 찢어진 곳을 꿰매는 바느질입니다. 보행은 찢어짐에 맞서는 저항입니다," meaning; "if the person walking is the needle, and the path they are walking is the thread, then the act of walking is sewing what is torn. Walking is resistance against being torn." Her both powerfully and beautifully stated analogy has guided me to realize the connection between the act of walking and the peaceful reunification of Korea. Just as we sew a cloth when it is torn, we must walk to fix and intertwine the broken. Walking is what breaks wars and is what allows for peace to transpire. As I mentioned above, I had an immense feeling of peace and calmness while walking along the fences of the DMZ. It was because we walked along the torn cloth. We were sewing what was torn, by demonstrating our peace.

I learned when I visited Moon Ik-Hwan's birth home, *House of Tongil*, that he was one of the best examples to show how we can walk in peace. Reverend Moon was a pastor, theologian, activist, and one of the most influential leaders in South Korea who remained passionate about the reunification of the Korean Peninsula. When he went to North Korea and met Kim Il-sung, he crossed not only the physical wall, but the ideological one that had created animosity between the two nations. The line is what separates the people, hence the cause of hate from one side to the other. For instance, the

wall Donald Trump placed between the U.S and Mexico, serves as a powerful means to effectively divide people in this country and exclude immigrants. The 38th parallel functions in a similar way; it serves to create antipathy and hostility in Koreans. It was Moon Ik-hwan who symbolically and physically walked through the line, and revealed that peace was indeed possible. Through his life, many are inspired to continue to work and walk for reunification. Moon Ik-hwan was the man to walk on the ground with no path and to manifest peace through walking.

I would not be passionate about this topic if it was not for what happened on April 27, 2018, where President Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong-un met each other at the summit. The historic event was an emotional and also a very joyous moment for many. President Moon Jae-in first crossed over to North Korea with Kim Jong-un and then proceeded to walk together toward South Korea, as a symbol of unity. As I mentioned before, just as I walked along the border as a symbol of peace and trying to “sew” together what was ripped, Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong-un did too. This day portrayed the peace and reconciliation between not only two separate nations, but a broken family. As I watched this in my cozy living room, I could sense the excitement in the air. Even though I was not born in Korea and probably did not fully understand the dreamlike moment, I found myself tearing up. Seeing the surreal event on television, I was overfilled with this warmth throughout my body. The moment gave me a new perspective on the reunification of the Korean peninsula. I witnessed this event and realized that reunification was truly possible. It was beautiful. It provided hope for a day where it will not be North and South, but just one Korea.

All of these events that occurred in the past few years have guided me to further understand the correlation between walking and peace, and how all of that relates to the reunification of Korea. It is through walking in which there is peace. We cannot face this with passivity. We must take action. We must ask ourselves if we are truly doing anything for this cause. Do you walk? I realized through the program in South Korea, the

visit to Moon Ik-hwan's birth home, Rebecca Solnit's book, and the inter-Korean summit between Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong-un, that these people have carved a path for us to walk on to create peace. Just as they did so, I will one day not only be walking along the border with kids from South Korea, but with the kids of North and South Korea walking from Pyongyang to Seoul. Step by step, we will walk together toward the goal of reunification. We will sew the ripped country back together, for there is no peace without walking in unity. So I walk.

I walk a lengthy path.

I see a river of tears as I walk.

I see a crippled man, and a wealthy man.

I see a tree with propaganda hanging as leaves.

I see a mugunghwa dying from the tall metal fence.

I see two wounded tigers growling at one another.

I smell the scent of iron from the river flowing with blood as I walk.

I smell the sweat and tears of those before me.

I smell the hot, humid air that suffocates me as I inhale.

I smell the rotting flesh below me.

I smell the gunpowder that streaks right past me.

I taste the bitterness that clouds the air as I walk.

I taste the blood that spews from up high.

I taste the salty tears that pour from the skies.

I taste metallic pieces of bombs, mixed with the earthy bits of dirt.

I taste the pungent odor of gunpowder.

I hear the arguments, they say, “you communist,” as I walk.

I hear the sniffles and weeping from one’s bed.

I hear the cries of pain, in which I cry too.

I hear the lies about one another, that freak, that monster, they say.

I hear the maniacal talks, or are they cries for help, people cannot tell.

I feel the blue casting over me as I walk.

I feel the rage of a bull charging at me.

I feel the tension of a rope used to play tug of war.

I feel the powerful wind of screaming and shouting pushing me back as I go.

I feel the pain of those who did not say bye, a stab to my heart as I cry.

So I walk