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# Remembering the Tiananmen Square Massacre<sup>1</sup>

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**Text: Matthew 9:9-13**

**T**ime doesn't stand still, time moves on.

Tiananmen Square is not the same ten years later, and it will be different ten years from now. It was a sunny and hot spring. Tiananmen Square is a famous place for all kinds of people, like visitors, politicians, filmmakers, and normal citizens. The only difference this time was that it was occupied by a large crowd of students and citizens. Students had occupied the Square since May 13, 1989 asking for political reform; this standoff lasted until June 4<sup>th</sup>.

June the 3<sup>rd</sup> was a peaceful night just like tonight. However, on June 4<sup>th</sup> just past midnight, peace began to disappear. The tanks moved in, crunching over barriers which started open fires. Many people screamed, fled, wept, and died. The situation was extremely confusing. This was not a Hollywood movie, but real ammunition being used against real people. When daybreak came, the most horrific scene was exposed. Bodies upon bodies soaked in blood lying on the streets and some were carried to the hospitals. Human beings have never looked so cheap.

Some say that the student movement had gotten out of hand. Some say that the students had asked too much from the Chinese government. Some say that the style of protest these students were demonstrating defied Chinese custom and the Chinese government was not ready to be changed that way. All that might be true. But all these don't

justify the use of force to kill unarmed citizens. It is unimaginable of any country to ask the army to kill its own people. It is like seeing fathers and mothers kill their own children. It is the ugliest scenario we ever want to see. Yet, it is an avoidable human tragedy.

It shocked me not because I am Chinese, but because I am a human being. Seeing those people being crushed and dying heightened my awareness of the fragility of human existence. Pain knows no national boundary. Tears have no color. If it hurts, it hurts, no matter who you are. I was in Kitchener-Waterloo when the incident occurred and I stayed tuned to the TV for very long hours everyday. I expressed little emotion because I didn't know how to feel. Not that I didn't care; rather, I was stunned.

Where do we go from here? Does what happened ten years ago matter to us today? In last Saturday's edition of the *Globe and Mail*, there was an article about Tiananmen Square. It records the conversation of several Chinese students now studying in Canada. They defy anything called Tiananmen Square Massacre. One of the students says, "We have not seen these pictures and, even if what you say is true, what does it matter today?" "What does democracy mean to me? I don't care about democracy. I want to make money." The newspaper continues to say, "His friends nod in agreement."

Is making money more important than seeking justice? Do we care for people's lives anymore? Does China need democracy? If so, what kind of democracy? How can we tell the difference between Americanization and democracy?

Democracy as a political and sociological ideal is bound to be imperfect. Like any other system, it is built by human hands and human wisdom, and we are too human to build any perfect society. There is great danger to worship the "tolerance spirit" and "individual right" in the expense of truth. In the name of rights, we have the opinion that my rights come over and above other people's rights, and concerns can be put aside. If what I have just described were human right, China doesn't need human right.

We need a new way to see our co-existence together. The beginning of change is to see that all human beings are precious and deserve to be respected. Our dignity is rooted in the image of God, not in the money market. We need to see that we are precious human beings created by

God. It doesn't matter what language we speak, what culture we claim we belong to, what social status we are in, and what kind of education we receive. We are all equal in the eyes of our Creator.

Have I said, "Equal"? Yes! Equal. We are equal not because the Canadian Constitution says so. But our Maker proclaims it. We are made to support one another, serve one another, and help one another; not to kill one another. Our differences don't justify discrimination with one another. In our Gospel reading for tonight, Jesus gives us a provocative lesson to be learned: How are we going to treat those whom societies declare unworthy, unclean and undesirable (Matthew 9:9-13)? Which is: To show mercy.

How much we desire to live in peace and in harmony. How much we want our streets to be safe. How much we want our schools to be good places to learn. How much we desire discrimination and violence to be turned into humble services. How are we going to do it? Is there a way out? It will not be easy. I don't presume to have all the answers, but at least we can dream dreams.

Let me propose: Unless we see that we are not the masters of the universe, we will continue to mistreat others. We will continue to presume that we are better than others because we speak a certain language, belong to a certain nationality, master certain skills, possess certain power, and the list goes on.

The Tiananmen Square Massacre exposed the destructiveness of power. We cried out:

There is a limitation to our human power.

Our weapons and machinery have to be used some other ways.

They should be designed to serve us, not to kill us.

There must be other ways, better ways to live our lives together on this planet earth.

We urge not just the Chinese government to change, but all governments to listen to their people: Develop listening ears to listen to what they have to say. Hear their real life experiences. Respect each individual.

It is not about Americanization. It is not about westernization. It is not even about politics. Rather, it is the basic survival skills of human communities that we all miss in the name of individual achievement. It is

the common sense that we miss so dearly in the name of scholastic excellency.

It is possible that our presupposed ideologies kill our passion for justice. It is possible that our preoccupied mindset blinds our eyes to see the truth. It is possible that our prejudices destroy our love of our neighbors.

What is in common between Tiananmen Square ten years ago and the event in Kosovo now? I think it is unavoidable to make mistakes when we try to make any parallel and comparison between the two. But I think we can say that both are confusing situations. In both situations, we ask: Who is telling the truth? Why do normal citizens have to put up with their governments? Is force necessary? And if it is, does it have to be that way?

Our hearts go out to the people in Kosovo and also in Yugoslavia. Both sides suffer in this tragic event. Both nations are victims of this imperfect world. All of us wish the peace of God to embrace us once again.

Tonight, we stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters who are in suffering. We are here not to lay any blame to anyone. We are here not to start another revolution. We are here, because we refuse to forget what had happened. We are here because we refuse to let materialism distort our appetite for truth. Our own existence will be in danger if we allow history to slip away without reflection. We refuse to let the tragic past haunt our lives on earth one more time.

Time doesn't stand still, it moves on. Tiananmen Square Massacre is forever on our minds. We will not forget it. We refuse to forget it. No way! It must be remembered. But we are not just to remember what happened, rather to learn from it. How much we want China and the world to change. But only God knows when and how. But one thing we know: China is not going to be the same after Tiananmen Square. The world is not going to be the same after the air strike in Yugoslavia. May God have mercy on us. Amen.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> Preached at the Candlelight Service for the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Tiananmen Square Massacre at Grace Lutheran Church, Burnaby, BC, on June 3, 1999.