Scripture: Exodus 1:1-7
Sermon: What It Sounds Like / translated by Melody Ouk

1.
If you travel to Greece, you can easily see the sign for Exodus (ἔξοδος) written in the Greek alphabet at the airport. It means "exit." Exodus is a compound word formed from "Ex" meaning "outside," and "hodus" meaning "path." It signifies an exit or escape. The title of the Hebrew Bible is Shemot. "Shem" is a name in Hebrew, and "shemot" is the plural form. Titles in the Hebrew Bible are created by taking the first letter of each word. The Book of Exodus begins with "Ve'elleh Shemot," which means "And these are the names." Why does the Book of Exodus start with the names of ancestors? Children, you have a time in history class at school where you memorize names. You have to memorize the names of all 45 U.S. presidents. Our friends in Korea, however, memorize the names of the kings of the Joseon Dynasty instead of the presidents' names. They memorize them by combining only the first letters of the 27 Joseon kings, like this: "Te-Jeong-Te-Se-Moon-Dan-Se..." The fact that the names of Jacob's twelve sons are listed at the very beginning of the Book of Exodus carries two meanings. First, it emphasizes that the Exodus of the Hebrew people was a historical fact, and second, it emphasizes that they are a people with deep roots. Even after hundreds or thousands of years have passed, when the people of Israel read this book and hear these names, they will come to know their roots and remember their history.

2.
The era of Jacob and Joseph has passed, and several generations have gone by. In fact, 400 years have passed. The names of Jacob's twelve sons are names of people from 400 years ago. What does it mean that several generations have already passed since they settled in the land of Egypt? It means that their identity has begun to fade. This is a problem we can fully understand by looking back at our own immigration history. Koreans began immigrating to the United States starting in 1883. Although their immigration history is short—at most five or six generations—the descendants of the Korean people have experienced significant identity confusion on American soil. It is more than simply a matter of being unable to speak or struggling with the Korean language. Many immigrants harbored the thought, "Is there really a need to live as a Korean even in America?" Was it any different for the Hebrew people who settled and lived in Egypt? At that time, Egypt was the world's leading superpower, far more magnificent than the United States is today. The Egyptian language and culture were the global standards. To survive in such a place, the Hebrews would have had to learn the Egyptian language. It is said that Joseph served as Prime Minister, and Joseph spoke the Egyptian language. When Joseph's brothers came to buy grain due to the famine, he had an interpreter present and conversed with them in Egyptian. For the generation of Joseph and his brothers' children, there must have been significant internal conflict regarding why they had to insist on using the Hebrew language. Later, after escaping Egypt and eating only manna and quail in the wilderness, they complained, recalling the delicious foods they had eaten in Egypt, including garlic and onions. It was a time when everything Egyptian—whether food or fashion—was considered the best, and the descendants of the Hebrew people must have undoubtedly experienced significant identity confusion and conflict within Egyptian society.

3.
The term "Diaspora" originated with the Israelites. The Jews, who were subjects of the Roman Empire, scattered across the world. Regardless of their location, those who maintained an identity directed toward their homeland—thinking, "Our identity is Jewish. Our destination is the land of Canaan"—were called the Diaspora. However, if people living scattered throughout the

land assimilate into the local culture or language, they are not necessarily referred to as the Diaspora. Here in Minnesota, there were many immigrants from Germany and Scandinavia. Yet, as the third and fourth generations of these immigrants passed, it became impossible to find anyone speaking German or Swedish. Even our pastor in the U.S. church recalls that his grandparents spoke Swedish during his childhood, and his mother was able to understand Swedish when she heard it. Yet, we do not call them the Diaspora. This is because they have already assimilated into the culture and language of this land, the United States. The Diaspora are people who do not forget their identity from their original homeland and who attach value to it. It is difficult for us to imagine what life must have been like for the Hebrew Diaspora who lived in Egypt during the Exodus. This is because it is a story from so long ago, and we are not well aware of the culture or customs of that time. Therefore, the only way to imagine what the Hebrew people of that era must have experienced as immigrants is by looking at the lives of modern immigrants and the diaspora.

You know the animation *Kpop Demon Hunters*, right? It is a film directed by Maggie Kang, the daughter of a Korean-Canadian immigrant. Maggie Kang reportedly immigrated to Toronto, Canada, in 1986 at the age of five. As a member of the diaspora, she has experienced many things throughout her life and expressed her experiences and emotions through the work *Kpop Demon Hunters*.

The plot of the animation *Kpop Demon Hunters* is simple. The main characters of the idol girl group named *Huntrix* are Rumi, Mira, and Zoey. Their job is to defeat monsters that suck positive energy out of people's hearts through music. They not only drive out monsters with songs but also aim to create a protective shield called the *Honmoon* overflowing with positivity in people's hearts to protect the entire world. The *Honmoon* is a shield that drives out all negativity. Even before the Huntrix, there were hunters who drove out monsters through music for generations. Much like the Book of Exodus, the film begins with the story of these ancestors. It is about remembering one's roots. The film presents the message from the very beginning that their current lives are rooted in history and culture. Just as their ancestors have done for generations, the *Huntrix*, a Demon Hunter, performs so well that the Demon Lord of Hell, Gwi-Ma, becomes furious. Consequently, Gwi-Ma employs the same strategy by forming a five-member boy group called the *Saja Boys*. They also sing. However, their songs drain energy from within people's hearts, gradually loosening the protective shield of the *Honmoon*. Nevertheless, the film has a simple plot in which the *Huntrix* eventually defeat Gwi-Ma and establish a new *Honmoon*.

4.
One of the key themes of this film is the conflict between the protagonist, Rumi, and the older generation of Demon Hunters who raised her. Rumi is a unique child, half demon and half demon hunter. Like a demon, markings occasionally appear on her body. In fact, this serves as a metaphor, referring to a child who simultaneously possesses both American and Korean identities. The older generation of Demon Hunters who raised her constantly tells Rumi to hide the markings. She has been comforting Rumi by saying, “Just hide it. Don’t worry. Those things inside your heart will all disappear once the *Hommoon* is complete. Just hide it until then! Just suppress it! You can do it!” However, Rumi realizes that she can no longer hide it. Eventually, her group members, Zoey and Mira, also discover this truth. As it is revealed in front of others that she is just like a demon, the *Huntrix* group falls apart. Rumi goes to find the person who raised her. It would be helpful to understand the conversation between the two as a dialogue between children of the diaspora and their parents. Children of the diaspora who first immigrated to the United States encounter a culture in their new home that is completely

different from the one they grew up in. Surrounded by friends with different skin colors and appearances, questions naturally arise: "Why do I look like this, and why do I live here?" While Korean culture has changed significantly now, for those who immigrated in the 1970s and 80s, the culture of that era likely remained intact. It was an era where adults were treated like gods. Wearing a hat during class or worship? That was unthinkable. You were forbidden from speaking at the dinner table. When they went home, their parents forced this culture upon them. Consequently, the children felt stifled whenever they were at home. The homes of their white friends, Tom and James, looked so happy. Their parents seemed nice; they would play if asked. However, because their own parents always appeared tense and weary, the children dared not ask them to play. On the one hand, knowing that their parents were suffering for their sake, the children must have experienced tremendous internal conflict. It is not that they do not understand their parents. As immigrants, they had to settle here through immense hardship. From the perspective of those who had no choice but to live as members of the lower social class, the only people who could understand them were their fellow immigrants. That is why they banded together tightly to preserve their culture. However, after about three generations, they began to question what value there was in preserving it. The Hebrew people must have felt the same way.

5.
This is a conversation between Rumi and Celine, the woman who raised her. “Everything I was taught told me you were wrong, but I made a promise. So I did my best to accept you and help you.” Celine explains. “Accept me? You told me to cover up, to hide.” Rumi replies. “Yes, until we can fix everything. And we still can. We can cover those up and put everything right again.” Celine says while fixing Rumi’s jacket. “No. No more hiding,” Rumi says. “No more lies! Don’t you get it? This is what I am. Look at me. Why can’t you look at me?! Why couldn’t you love me?!” Rumi asks. “I do!” Celine replies. “All of me!” She shouts. Just as she says this, the ground begins to rumble and shake with a deep, resonant vibration. “This is why we have to hide it. Our faults and fears must never be seen. It’s the only way to protect the *Honmoon*.” Celine pleads. “If this is the *Honmoon* I’m supposed to protect, I’m glad to see it destroyed.” With that, Rumi walks away.

This is the kind of conversation that likely takes place at least once in a diaspora household: “You have to live in this country, after all. You can’t act like that. Don’t draw attention to yourself. Keep it hidden. It’ll work out in the end. That’s why I’m helping you.” “I’ve kept it hidden, but I can’t anymore. I have no choice but to act this way, and I like who I am—so why won’t you accept me just as I am, Mom and Dad?” “No, I’m telling you, I love you.” “You need to love <u>all</u> of me, just as I am.” “But you have to uphold the *Honmoon*! It’s the *Honmoon*, kid. Don’t you get it?” “If that’s what the *Honmoon* is, I’d rather destroy it than uphold it.” And with that, she walks out of the house.

Rumi then appears in the form of a demon and begins to sing, embracing her true self. That’s when Gwi-Ma (played by Lee Byung-hun) sneers and says, “You come here like this? You think you can fix the world? You can’t even fix yourself. And now everyone finally sees you for what you really are. And the *Honmoon* is gone.” Rumi replies to Gwi-Ma, “It is. So we can make a new one.” This is the central theme of Kpop Demon Hunters. It’s not about the older immigrant generation being wrong; rather, in this new era, what the younger generation creates isn't simply about preserving the old ways. “Yeah, I’m half-Korean and half-American. So what? What am I supposed to do about my identity being this complex? I’m still *me*.” That is the powerful message they deliver. And the final song they sing is “What It Sounds Like.”

The lyrics go like this: Nothing but the truth now / Nothing but the proof of what I am / The worst of what I came from, patterns I'm ashamed of / Things that even I don't understand / I tried to fix it, I tried to fight it / My head was twisted, my heart divided /My lies all collided /I don't know why I didn't trust you to be on my side / I broke into a million pieces, and I can't go back / But now I'm seeing all the beauty in the broken glass / The scars are part of me, darkness and harmony / My voice without the lies, this is what it sounds like”

It tells us how by cherishing their identities and by embracing them, even the "demon" within, they can create a new song and new culture. Gwi-Ma whispers to them, “Because of the mistakes in your past, you can’t do anything. You’re no good!” Yet, refusing to hide their true nature or identity, *Huntrix* sings their own song and completes a new *Honmoon*. Though they are beings of mixed identities, the message *Kpop Demon Hunters* conveys to us is that they will change the world through songs that inspire dreams and hope.

6.
The Hebrew slaves surely experienced this kind of conflict between the generation of parents and the generation of children—a struggle that we, as Christians living in the world, also face. The Lord embraces us exactly as we are, holding even our past mistakes within His care. Now, He invites us to step out into the world and—fueled by the positive energy He provides—sing a new song and forge a new history. This is the heart of the Lord as He calls out to the Hebrew people, generations after the death of Joseph. The time has come for them to follow God and reveal to the whole world their calling and identity: to be a blessing to all nations. It is time not only to manifest their identity as God’s people within Egypt but also to demonstrate, through their lives, just how beautiful God is. God is calling the Hebrew slaves for this very purpose; this is how that magnificent story begins. Even now, the Lord calls to us: "Change this world with a new song. Go out into the world embracing your true essence and identity as a child of God. Accept your broken past and your wounds exactly as they are." Through the Book of Exodus, we will now share in God’s story—a story of dreaming of and creating a new world alongside those Hebrew slaves of the diaspora. God’s story, moving toward a new path and a new world, continues.