

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
January 1, 2017

Sing a New Song to the Lord

Psalm 33:1-4

33:1 Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright.

33:2 Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre; make melody to him with the harp of ten strings!

33:3 Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.

33:4 For the word of the LORD is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness.

1. Real Newness

A New Year has come. On the New Year's Day, we eat *Zoni*, a special soup with mochi in it and *Osechi*, a traditional New Year's food, and we all feel new. But the fresh feeling fade away as the days go by. There is scripture in the Ecclesiastes 1:5-9 as follows;

The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises. The wind blows to the south and goes around to the north; around and around goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns. All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again. All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.

When we hear "there is nothing new under the sun", our excitement

toward the New Year might fade out, but is there not anything new? What is “real newness” if there is?

The truly new is different from novelty. From the ancient ages, people used to jump on to a novel thing. The New Testament wrote about the people in Athenians in Acts 17:21, “Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.” Any automakers change their models every year and the same thing happens in the fashion world. When I went to Japan about fifteen years ago, young women used to put a dark (almost black) make-up, whereas nowadays, they put white make-up, which made me feel bewildered – my eyes also became black and white. Fashion changes so rapidly and what used to be new quickly becomes old. Even if you catch the trend, that does not mean you can get something new. Even if you change the appearance, it does not mean you are renewed inside. As the Ecclesiastes tells us, there is indeed nothing truly new under the sun, or in other words, in this world.

But there is truly new in Heaven. The New Testament says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” When people believe in Jesus Christ, they are born again by the Holy Spirit and become renewed from inside. And, the freshness never die. I am sure all of you who believe in Jesus Christ, still hold the excitement at the time of the confession and baptism.

I had several classes from Dr. Akira Hatori at my seminary in Japan. In his first class every year, he always talked about how he was led to Jesus Christ by a missionary and became to believe Him and

got saved. I heard the same story three times, but every time I heard it, I was so moved. Dr. Hatori also showed tears every time he made the testimony. The new thing in Jesus Christ never fades away. 2 Corinthians 4:16 says, “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.”

The Psalms says in 33:1 “Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright.” The word “righteous” or “upright” does not mean a person has been righteous and upright from the beginning. There is no one truly righteous or upright in front of God. Those who can stand in front of God are the ones whose sins are erased and defects are covered by His Grace. As verse 4 says, “For the word of the LORD is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness”, righteous and upright refers to the people who are redeemed by Jesus Christ and invited to the life in fear for God. In other words, those people are deemed righteous and upright because they believe in the God’s word and trust in His works. By Jesus Christ, we receive new status, new class, new character and new life. Those who receive a new life will get a new song, which is a praise song to God.

2. New Song

Psalm 33:3 calls a song of praise a “new song”. What does the word “new song” means? There are three meanings. First, it means a song with new words and melody. When the faith of people was renewed, always new songs were created. Reformer Martin Luther wrote hymns by himself and published them. In England, Issac Watts wrote 600 hymns. Charles Wesley wrote numerous hymns at the time of revival.

Many of them are still sung. We sing “Hark! The herald angels sing” in Christmas season. This hymn is also written by Charles.

Second meaning of “new song” is that it should be sung with “new heart”. Even contemporary praise songs, the contents are not totally new. They sing the unchanging truth – the creation and providence of God, the redemption of Jesus Christ, the joy of faith. New songs also sing the old faith of the Bible. Both old hymns and new praise songs have the same contents. The contents should be the same.

We learn the truth of faith by singing hymns of church since the hymns sing the truth of faith, that is about God’s love and faithfulness; the salvation by Jesus Christ, etc. However, we had many hymns that you couldn’t sing from the bottom of the heart until you believed in Jesus Christ. For example, the refrain of hymn #232 sings, “On Calvary! On Calvary! It was for me that Jesus died, on the cross of Calvary.” Hymn #321 refrain also sings, “Mercy there was great, and grace was free; pardon there was multiplied to me; There my burdened soul found liberty at Calvary.” We couldn’t sing the songs that sing the redemption of Jesus Christ until we were redeemed from sin. The book of Revelation mentions “new song” that sings the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and can be sung only by redeemed souls (Revelation 5:9, 14:3). Though we could sing as music, but not as “new songs” – the song of faith. Hymn #301, “Amazing Grace” – the most popular hymn in the world, is the hymn we can sing only after we acknowledge we are sinners before God, and know the grace of forgiveness by Jesus Christ, and accept the salvation by faith. It is wonderful that hymns are sung by many people, but more wonderful is that singers accept the truth that the hymn sings; people sing the

“new song” that praising the redemption of Jesus Christ with the redeemed hearts.

Sometimes, I hear, “The words of old hymns are too difficult to understand, and the melody is too simple to enjoy.” Most of the words of hymns are in literary style for saving words, but not in archaic words. You can find the meaning easily in dictionaries. In most case, we cannot understand the words because we don’t understand the truth of faith that the hymn expresses. You can find the Bible verse that the hymn comes from, in your hymn book. If you read and learn the verse, you will find each of the hymn words has deep meaning. We can sing old hymns as “new songs” with our redeemed and renewed hearts.

3. To the Lord

Finally, songs of praise are often defined as “new songs” because it is sung “to the Lord.” Who did we sing for when we don’t know God? It was probably to you. When we feel sad or disappointed, it makes us sing a song that we used to have sung in elementary schools, or that we sang with friends at youthful time, in order to encourage you or comfort you. When my wife and I visited to see Japanese people in hospitals or care homes, they almost always asked of my wife to sing “*Furusato*” (Hometown), a folk song of Japan. For those who left Japan right after WW II, the song might sound very nostalgic to them. Next, you might sing for others, perhaps. Even though you are not professional, people loving to sing hope to have audience and sing for people to listen to their singing.

However, believers sing to the Lord in addition to themselves and

others. We became to know that God was the Father of Jesus Christ when we believe in Jesus Christ and moreover, He was no longer an ambiguous existence and He was also the Father of us. We then recognize that we sing hymns to the God. Hymns we have sung became “the new songs” right after we believe in Him.

When I am leading the service facing to you, I see some people sing very brightly, and others keep silence. I suppose the silent people might listen to others singing, taste the lyrics and praise the Lord in their mind, but if you are embarrassed by your singing or concerned about your technique, please leave them after and sing with your own voice. When you sing the praise songs for others, you should express beauty and powerfulness and design the message. If, however, you sing to God at worship time, you only need to seek God. He will look at your praising heart and be delighted by your singing voice.

When I think about praising, I often remember the home assembly that was opened in the house of one maternity nurse. This kind of nurses in Japan was often elderly, and so was she. She lost her husband in youthful time and lived her life alone. She kept saying, “Jesus is with me,” and took care of others like young people. She once told me that she only had sung folk songs, and every praise song that she sang sounded a folk song,” but she was very joyful while singing. “Live in the Flow” was her favorite song. It surely sounded a folk song, and very remarkable because she didn’t have instruments but resonant voice. Actually, her praising was amazing enough to touch my heart. Moreover, God would rejoice her praising more than anything. I cannot forget her beautiful tears while singing the song.

Another favorite song of her was “There Is a Fountain Filled with

Blood.” The last line says, “When this poor lisping, stammering tongue. Lies silent in the grave, then in a nobler, sweeter song, I’ll sing Thy power to save.” Even if we have skills, angels and saints sing more than better. As Hebrew 13:15 says, “Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name,” we only need to sing to the Lord to give Him joy. Through atoning of Jesus Christ, keep us be new person with new heart, singing to the Lord with the new song, also in this year.

(Prayer)

Dear Father, we sing over 200 songs at the Sunday worship services in a year. Lead us to sing these songs always to You. May our singing be the new songs of those who are redeemed by Jesus Christ. Make our songs harmonize with the songs of angels and saints, and make them become the sacrifice to be offered up in the holy temple of heaven. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.