

Thursday, July 2, 2020

**Sing to the Lord a new song! - Pastor Hank French**

*O sing to the Lord a new song;  
sing to the Lord, all the earth.  
Sing to the Lord, bless his name;  
tell of his salvation from day to day.  
Declare his glory among the nations,  
his marvelous works among all the peoples (Psalm 96:1-3).*

When I was serving in Japan, I was assigned to be the pastor of Masuda Lutheran Church, a small congregation in a fishing village on the Sea of Japan. The treasurer/pianist for the church—a woman named Mitchiko—was the music teacher at the local middle school.

She told me that a few years earlier she had taught her middle school choir the Hallelujah Chorus from Handel's Messiah. I was amazed! Those kids had since moved on to high school, but she was sure she could convince several of them to attend church on the Sunday I was to be installed to sing the Hallelujah Chorus during the service. She confessed, however, that none of the kids were Christian and she wondered if that mattered.

I said, "Absolutely not!"

On the day of my installation, a choir of 13 high school students filled that small worship space with the glorious strains of Handel's music. It was wonderful! Those kids could really sing. As we ate lunch together after the service, I asked if they would be interested in forming a "praise team," a gospel song singing group that could sing for my congregation and that could travel to other nearby churches to perform concerts of Christian praise music to which people from the surrounding community would be invited.

To my surprise and delight, 9 of the 13 said, "Yes!"

Mitchiko agreed to conduct and they went to work, learning new music and rehearsing one night a week. After a few months of rehearsing and singing in church, the "Gospel Folk" praise team held its first concert at Tokuyama Lutheran Church. Between members of the church and folks from the community, around 50 people crowded into the small sanctuary. It was a blast!

Here were these non-Christian kids singing new songs to the Lord, blessing his name, telling of his salvation, declaring his glory and his marvelous works, spreading the message of God's love for all people. Psalm 96 playing out in rural Japan.

What a gift those young people were to me, to the church and to those who attended their concerts. Not all, but several of them were changed by the lyrics they sang, touched by the gospel of God's love and grew into strong people of faith. The persuasive power of the gospel of God's love to change lives never ceases to amaze me.

Prayer: Thank you for those young people who had the courage to sing a new song and found themselves in the circle of your love. Amen.