

“Empowered to Praise”

[Acts 16:25-34](#)

Last week, the South Korean pop group, *BTS* made history by rising to the number-one spot on the Billboard 200 albums chart and breaking into the Top 10 of the Hot 100 singles chart. “Love Yourself: Tear,” which was released last month, is the first mostly non-English album to top the Billboard 200 list in 12 years. “Fake Love,” which the group performed at the Billboard Music Awards a couple of week ago, joins only a handful of non-English singles ever to break into the Top 10.

This South Korean band has devoted fans all around the globe, who call themselves, the ARMY, an acronym for “Adorable Representative M.C. for Youth.” Maybe, some of you are *BTS* fans and part of the *BTS* ARMY? Though they neither speak nor understand Korean, the *BTS* fandom is passionate about the K-pop band and their songs. Thanks to their loyalty, the seven-member superstar boy band has been, collectively, the most tweeted-about celebrity for the last two years.

Certainly, music is “an explosive expression of humanity,” as the iconic American musician Billy Joel once said. No matter what culture we are from or what language we speak, everyone loves music. Music fuels our mind and creativity. Music helps us feel and express our emotions. Music brings people together. In the words of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “music is the universal language of humankind.”

Music is an essential part of our life as a church, too. Our worship service begins and ends with music that Shine beautifully plays on the organ or piano. Throughout the service, there are many different kinds of music played and sung. Thankfully, our congregation is one that welcomes and appreciates both traditional and contemporary, vocal and instrumental music.

We love to not only listen to music but also sing it. Both women and men, the young and old, whether we are musically trained or not, we all enjoy singing together in worship. Can you imagine our worship service without music?

Music has been an important part of the community of believers throughout our tradition. The Old Testament is filled with many scriptures that indicate singing and using musical instruments in the act of worship. In its original form, the entire book of psalms was a book of songs for believers. Biblical scholars believe that many parts of the books of prophets were not spoken, but sung.

And we know that music continued to play an important role in the life of the early Christian church. Several best-known early Christian hymns are Mary’s song, Zechariah’s song, the Angels’ song, and Simeon’s song, which are recorded in the Gospel of Luke. The Gospel writers report that Jesus and his disciples sang hymns together. The Apostle Paul often encouraged Christian believers to sing to one another in psalms, hymns, and other spiritual songs. And the Apostle James had this to say to first century Christian believers, “Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.”

Yes, we sing when we are thankful and happy. In such joyful times, songs come to our lips easily as natural expressions. As one of the songs we like to sing says, "I sing because I'm happy. I sing because I'm free..." We sing cheerfully, "I've got the joy joy joy joy down in my heart!..." But, what about when we are not so joyful? Can you sing when you find yourself on the opposite end? Can you sing in times of trouble when you are distressed?

The people of Israel could not bring themselves to do so during the Babylonian exile. Their captors asked them to sing songs of joy. But, deeply saddened and wallowing in self-pity, they could not sing. They refused to sing in the presence of their enemy. Psalm 137 says, as deep hurts and memories of better days in their homeland took their joy and song, the Israelites hung their harps on the willow trees and wept. So they missed the opportunity to sing, to witness to their God while in the foreign land.

However, today's scripture that Trent read for us tells us quite a different story. We heard how Paul and Silas sang hymns to God even when things were going wrong. During their mission trip, they had run into a terrible incident. They were wrongly accused and unjustly punished. They were severely beaten and flogged in public, and then thrown in jail. Anyone in that situation would rightfully be feeling quite upset, angry, anxious, and even fearful. But, not Paul and Silas. They were not defeated. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, they were praying and singing hymns to God well into the night! They were so enthusiastic in their worship that everyone else in jail could hear them.

And then, it happened! The power of the Holy Spirit was unleashed in that place. Suddenly, all the prison doors broke open, and the prisoners were set free. Incredibly, the prison guard and his whole family repented and became followers of Jesus! As the servants of God prayed and praised in spite of their adversity, a miracle happened.

My friends, we are called to sing not only when we are happy and full of joy, but even in joyless situations. We are called to praise God even when we find ourselves in the dark night of helplessness and hopelessness, in the midst of our worries about illnesses, financial challenges, and broken relationships. We are called to sing in the midst of all the hurts and pains we face in our personal lives and in the world.

We praise God because of who God is for us. We praise God because the God that we know and continue to experience along our journeys of faith is faithful, steadfast, and loving to all generations. No matter what life brings our way, we know that God will always be here with us and for us. We know that God will always be in control.

We praise God because we trust that no matter how much we suffer, no matter how many times we doubt, no matter how angry we get at God, no matter how many times we ask in desperation, "Why me?" and "How long?" God has been, is, and always will be loving, steadfast, and faithful. God is there and will always be there in our deepest troubles, walking with us and guiding our way. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we praise God so that we can embrace our calling to live out our hope and our confidence in God's grace each and every moment of our lives.

So, let us praise God with everything we've got - with our voices, with our bodies, with our musical instruments. Let us praise God lustily and with good courage, as John Wesley, one of the founders of the Methodist movement, was fond of saying. Let us praise God not only on Sunday in church but also every day of the week out in the world. Let us praise God always. [*Sing the children's song*: Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him in the morning, Praise Him at the noontime. Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him when the sun goes down!"]

Honestly, I knew nothing about *BTS* until last week. But, after watching some of their music videos on YouTube, intrigued by their rising popularity, I realized why the ARMY love the Korean boy band: Every performance they give is amazing. They sing and dance each piece as if it is their one and only performance. You can tell that they are giving their songs all their might. No wonder their music is rocking the whole world!

Joined by all the saints in heaven, all of God's children around the world, and God's creation, let us too praise God with all our heart, with all our soul, and all our might. May we sing loudly for the world to hear, so that others may know Jesus Christ, our Lord and savior. Hallelujah! Thanks and Praise be to God!