

From the editor

We had the February Bible Study in the Wilderness with the subject "By which praise song did you experience healing?" For this issue, we will gratefully introduce two testimonies from them, "True Identity," by Yumiko Tokuhara, "Sound of Presence of Lord's Love," by Keiko Kajiwara, Kohitsuji no Mure staff workers.

True Identity

Yumiko Tokuhara

In January 2000, I started a Kohitsuji no Mure house gathering. Till 1999 for a year, I had been an exchange student in America, where I could not go to the Kohitsuji no Mure church as I did in Japan. Feeling left alone in the wilderness, I learned to face the Lord alone, and decided to open my house gathering upon returning to Japan.

At my first gathering, a staff worker brought a tape of "Holy, Alleluia," the praise born on the 5th anniversary of the Great Hanshin Earthquake, January 17, 2000. It is from Revelation 4:8.

*♪ Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come! ♪*

It sounded coming from different dimensions of the universe and yet so familiar and dear that I listened to the tape intensely. From then on, every time I attended the church's weekly service, new praise songs (which we call

Heavenly Praises) were introduced. Every praise was so beautiful, and the service was so filled with the presence of the Lord that I could not help but shedding tears.

In those days, they were called the Revelation Praises, and also said to be the praises of shaking. As for me also, I felt the coming of the time for my life to be changed drastically. Yet, while my spirit was filled with joy, my flesh was stubbornly attached to the world. It was the struggle between the spirit and my fleshly attachment. I knew that I was called by the Lord, but could not say “Yes” and follow Him. I felt being urged to follow the Lord, abandoning every earthly desire of mine. Yet, it was too painful and fearful for me.

One morning, I somehow sensed, “Today the Lord shall give me the answer,” and I went to someone’s house gathering. On my way to her house I heard a voice of the Lord saying, “Why do you spend money on what is of no use? Come, eat and drink without money and without cost!” In puzzlement I talked about it to the people in the gathering, and someone said, “It is in the Bible.” She tried but could not find its location. Back home, I prayed for it and randomly opened the Bible. It was Isaiah 55. Why! The exact message I heard in the morning was there.

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters;
and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without
cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and
your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to
me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the
richest of fare. (Isaiah 55:1-2 NIV)

My grandparents came from Jeju Island, Korea to Japan during the war. I am the 3rd generation Korean resident in Japan. I had long searched for my identity. Trying to find the answer for minorities in society to be themselves beyond discrimination, prejudice, and rootlessness, I studied hard and volunteered in community action groups.

However, the more I did, the drier my spirit became. While knowing deep inside that it was not what I should keep doing, I could not stop it. Then the word of Isaiah 55 was given to me. I recognized that it was the answer from the Lord. And I made up my mind to abandon everything and follow Him.

I became a missionary worker of Kohitsuji no Mure. In praying to the Lord what message I should give in the time of the English message, I felt being told to speak of Isaiah 55. And to my utter surprise, a new praise was introduced on that day. It was from Isaiah 55! Moreover, it was exactly one year after the scripture had been given to me. Isaiah 55 had propelled my faith to step forward and respond to His calling, and now through its praise, my eyes were opened to the will of the Lord who is bestowing the Heavenly Praises, that is, for all nations to return to the love of Christ. He is our Peace.

Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations you do not know will come running to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor.

(Isaiah 55:5 NIV)

The Heavenly Praises are truly mysterious. They have the power to shake our deepest part unknown even to

ourselves and make us stand on the will of the Lord.

As to the question “By what praise did you experience healing?” I cannot pinpoint only one, for I think I have been healed by each one. Praise has become my true identity. Praise has broken down the dividing wall of hostility within me. I believe praise outpours His healing on the entire human history beyond time and restores every living creature to its original image of God.

There are many who suffer from not knowing who they are. The reasons are various: not getting along with their families, having different identities from society’s norms such as gender identity of LGBT, and others. No matter what our problems are, the love of God covers the whole of us, including our sorrow, pain, and anger. His love heals and transforms us to the most beautiful self. To His eyes everyone is precious and special. God loves each one so much that He gave the life of His only Son Jesus to us. Believing that in praise all created shall return to God and become one family of God, I will continue to sing praise.

February 5, 2020

Sound of Presence of Lord’s Love

Keiko Kajiwara

I used to attend a local Baptist church in New York City before I encountered Kohitsuji no Mure. In that church, nothing especially was attractive to me other than the

international atmosphere created by varieties of ethnic groups of people gathered from all over the world. However, there was one thing I felt very special. That was the praise played by one organist of the church. In our worship, when we sang praises together with his organ, it felt as if the whole congregation became one, flying up to heaven. Praise songs that he wrote were also included officially in the traditional hymn books in the U.S. But even in that church, praise played a side-role, and the sermon of pastors took the center stage of the worship. I always wondered why the church did not regard praise as the center of the worship, despite having such amazing praises.

Around that time, I attended a Kohitsuji no Mure Sunday worship held at the house of Hayasaka family in New Jersey. There, a praise-centered worship was offered, and I deeply agreed with Pastor Peter's words, "Everything is completed in Praise," which I'd never heard before, though I didn't know what it meant. My inner self rejoiced, enthusiastically responding to his words, "Yes, yes, it's really true!" This had happened still before the Revelation Praises were given to us, and so, we were singing praise songs by Taizé and others in worship. But even then, holy air filled the room, and outside the window, the rich, flourishing nature of New York suburb was shining sparkingly, as if praising together with us. I thought there is truth in this worship.

Later, on January 17th, 2000, the Revelation Praises started to be pouring upon us from heaven, and the first one I remembered was the song of "Tataeyo" ("Praise Him" in English).

♪ *Praise Him*

*I Praise Him, praise Him.
Praise our Lord and God ...*

*II Blood of Jesus, blood of Jesus shed for me.
Holy blood of Lord Jesus ...
Blood of Jesus, blood of Jesus poured on me.
Holy blood of Lord Jesus. Alleluia ...*

I was so surprised by this song because it praised the blood of Jesus, which I had never ever imagined of. For no reason, I knew “The true one has finally come!”

The Revelation Praises also sounded much resembling the melodies and sounds which I used to hear springing up in me in my youth. They made me feel nostalgic. And after the 911 terrorist attacks in the U.S. in 2001, urged by God, I decided to become a Kohitsuji no Mure house church leader.

If the Revelation Praises had not been given to us first, I don’t know whether I was able to make my decision to stand as a leader, or not. The Lord had known my heart and provided me with the Revelation Praises in advance, which I can now see. As such, I understand the Revelation Praises are important gifts sent from heaven in this End Time, our helper to live through this bad age and the protector of the flock of praise.

Ever since, I have been healed so much just by being in praises. I am still being healed now. If I try to write about one of those healings, that would be for me to know Cosmic Worship, in which heaven and earth praise together. In other words, it was to know the fact that “I am not alone” but made one in the resounding tunes of the Cosmic Body of Christ

(this must be Praise, I think). The Praise itself has revealed this mystery to me: Past, present and future, good and bad, and you and me, all are made one through Christ's atonement beyond time and space.

At the same time, this healing is to experience the truth: All in all - all kinds of feelings and wounds in me, sufferings, sickness and anger, things that I do not want - are embraced by the love of the Lord. I believe Praise is the sound of the holy presence of such Lord's love.

I am not a type of person to shed tears moved by praise, but there was a heavenly praise song with which I could not hold back my overwhelming tears. It was "Joy of the Lord Overflows."

*♪ The Joy of the Lord, the joy of the Lord.
The Joy of the Lord overflows. ♪*

In an early morning worship of Kohitsuji no Mure Kobe retreat in 2014, which was the year when I became a staff worker, I heard this gentle, yet overwhelming praise completely overflowed the worship hall.

Hearing it, I could not stop crying, "Oh, I didn't know how happy it makes me to know that the Lord is happy!" I was wrapped by love, which made me feel as if my existence were melting into the heavenly praise. "The Joy of the Lord," that means - the Lord Himself is healed (so I say, though I may sound a bit arrogant).

It indeed was a profound healing for me to have known how much my spirit yearned for Him to be healed, and its time has finally come.

Lord, may Your joy fill the entire earth. The deep

healing brought by Your joy, healing of Joy, is beyond my imagination. I believe there is nothing that escapes from Your joy. Praise is the Lord's joy, and our joy. May Your desire and love be done on all created.

Amen.

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