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Isaiah 43:14-21

Philippians 3:12-16

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See, I am doing a new thing

God created mankind to praise Him! Look at verse 21: "The people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise." To proclaim the praise means to praise God and God's presence. When we are happy, we write beautiful poems and compose songs to the tune of the lyrics. Because God created us to praise Him, to glorify Him. Our many offerings and services for God are secondary. The meaning of our existence is to praise God and we have to precede God's praise.

When Kenta, my oldest son, was a small child, Kenta was abused by his own father and was mentally scarred and had been crying every day. It was about four years after he was separated from his father, when Kenta was about 7 years old, and when we were still living in Canada. One day, I was working and my mom was taking care of my kids, Kenta and Taishi. Whenever I came home, my mom told what happened to my kids during the day times. My mom said, "You know? Today, Kenta was singing for the first time. He just started singing merrily from today." My mother was crying as she said this. When I saw her, I knew that my mom had been feeling sad to see her grandson, Kenta had lost his singing because his heart was broken. However, today she was very happy when Kenta recovered his singing.

I was amazed that my mom could think whether her grandchild was healthy or not just by whether he would sing or not. At the same time, I learned for the first time how important singing is to human beings. If we are spiritually healthy, both physically and mentally, we will naturally praise God. However, if there are people among us who have lost our singing and dancing, I pray that today will be a day when praise can be restored.

Now, what are we praising God for? Look at verse 14. "This is what the LORD says –your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel." First, let's praise our LORD for redeeming us. Redemption (1) in Old Testament times meant buying back real estate or relatives who had sold themselves in debt for a price from the buyer. In the book of Ruth, Boaz had this right to redeem for Naomi and Ruth. This redemption, concept of buying back from their debtor is very important throughout the Old and New Testaments. God redeemed

us from Satan, the death and sins by crucifying His Only Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross.

Colossians 1:14 says, "In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." First of all, what we praise and proclaim God for is that He purchased and redeemed us from our sins. Everyone here has this grace already, don't you? If you don't accept this grace of redemption yet, please believe in Jesus Christ in your heart today. I pray that you will be freed from your sins, purchased and redeemed. And you will have the eternal life because of believing in Jesus.

From the first half of verse 14 that we just read, we can see that the Israelites are experiencing redemption. That is the famous Exodus. Isaiah lived around BC 690, so the Exodus was about BC 1290. Israel should have loudly praised God for freeing them from slavery in Egypt and redeeming them. However, the Israelites were taken captive by the powerful nation of Babylon in BC 587, and instead of praising God, they were sad and mourning at the time. But God promises to redeem His people who lost their praise because of their captured long suffering.

Look at the second half of verse 14. "For your sake I will send to Babylon and bring down as fugitive all the Babylonians, in the ships in which they took pride." Isaiah prophesied that Babylonians will thrust down all their ships in which they are singing for joy. God promised to deliver the Israelites from the great power of Babylon. Historically, the Persians destroyed Babylon in BC 539 and the Babylonian nobles who were singing in their boats, boasting of their wealth, were thrown off their ships just as God had said (2 Study Bible).

What will we praise about God next? Look at verse 15. "I am the LORD, your Holy One, Israel's Creator, your King." God is holy and He is our Lord, Creator and King to us. The Israelites were afraid of the king of Babylon. In this way, there are times when we have frightening husbands, rambunctious children, and harassing bosses who scold us and control us like kings. But our real king is God. This King is the Almighty God who has redeemed us and can control all our circumstances.

Look at verses 16 and 17. "This is what the LORD says—he who made a way through the sea, a path through the might waters, who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguishes, snuffed out like a wick." God reminds them of how the Israelites were when they went through the Exodus. The Israelites were freed from 430 years of slavery and

experienced the miracle of crossing the Red Sea. In Exodus 15, we can see the praise of Moses and Miriam with singing and dancing. At this time, the Israelites proudly praised God. God became the King of Israel again and restored praise and dance to the Israelites who had lost it. Hallelujah!

Look at verse 18. "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past." God says, "Don't think about what you've been through before! Don't stop at the past! There are both good and bad things that happened in the past. But God says, "Forget the past!" If we have experienced something painful in the past, we think about it and could not take a step forward. And if we have experienced something good in the past, we bask in the glory of it and not take a step forward too. We, human beings are a wonder, aren't we?

But God says don't think about what happened before! Why did he said like that? Look at verse 19. "See I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland." Wow! God is saying that we don't need to remember the miracles and joys of the past any more, like the Exodus a thousand years ago, and also forget the painful events of the Babylonian captivity that happened just recently. For God is going to do something new to His people. God's thoughts are not dwelling in the past, but only moving forward.

Here, "I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland" is a promise to free the Israelites from Babylon and help them return to Judah right along. Originally, the Arabian Desert between Babylon and Judah would have to be passed through, but God promises to set up the closest road connecting Babylon and Judah through a straight road in the desert. The deliverance from Babylon, which is impossible from a human perspective, will be speeded up by God's doing something new. Who knew that the Israelites was freed just 70 years after from captive of Babylon. Who knew that the strong great Babylon was destroyed suddenly by Persia. Only almighty our God knew that all the things. Hallelujah!

He says that animals will also praise His work. Look at verse 20. "The wild animals honor me, the jackal and the owls, praise me. Because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen." Here, the wild animals can be interpreted as an animal, but here it refers to the Gentiles. It is a prophecy that the Gentiles will praise and honor God after seeing His great miracles in Israel. As promised, God liberated Israel from Babylon after 70 years of slavery and allowed them to return to Jerusalem. Seeing this feat of God, many Gentiles of that time must have

praised God. And also about 500 years later, this promise of God was fulfilled by Jesus Christ. The gospel of God's forgiveness of sins and salvation through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ was preached not only to Israel but also to the Gentiles. And now the grace of the gospel is being proclaimed to us. In fact, God's plan has been fulfilled without a single waste.

God is really doing new things that cannot be compared to what He has done in the past. Look at the verse 21, "The people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise." God is very pleased that we praise and honor Him for His work. God will do new things to restore praise to those who have lost it.

It's called Corona Blue. The whole society is depressed. As you know well, the plague had been going around since the 14th century. One-third of the population of Europe was killed in the plague. The second and third pandemics continued until the 20th century, and human beings have been fighting against the epidemic of plague for a long time.

During the second pandemic in 1665, the plague broke out in England, and Isaac Newton (1642-1727), who was teaching at Cambridge University, had to return to the countryside for school holidays. It was during this period that Newton discovered the universal force of gravitation and wrote papers about it, making a great contribution to science. In the midst of a painful history, human beings discovered new things and used them as the way for progress. Many scientists have confessed that such inspiration comes from God. God is the one who gives mankind new blessings in times of hardship. We don't know for sure at this moment of Covid-19, but new things may be happening rapidly because of our God.

This change is also happening in our Mennonite Japanese church, isn't it? Pastor Gerald and Rie-san will be coming to Japan next week. And Mennonite Japanese Church will be a non-pastoral church without an official pastor.

In the June message, Pastor Gerald gave us a message on Philippians 3:12-14. "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

From Paul's faith in progress alone, we can learn to have faith in our God who is

always doing something new. Let us also move forward with faith in our God who does new things. And let's expect that our God will do something new for Mennonite Japanese Church. And let's praise God for His work.

Last week, Ezra's mother, Diane, shared her testimony with us briefly. With tears in her eyes, she told us that this small church did its best to take care of the single mother and her children. I totally agree with her. When I was a single mother struggling to raise my children in Canada and even after I moved to Tokyo, I was able to recover and be healthy because of the support of my brothers and sisters in our church. I give thanks and praise to God for using Mennonite Japanese Church in such a great way.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Pastor Gerald and Rie san for their 13 years of ministry. As I was preparing this message, I realized that our church was always praise God with songs and instruments constantly. That's because Pastor. Gerald and Rie-san were from a musical family. Thanks to the musical talents of Gerald and his family, our church was always filled with praise. We had taken this for granted, but it was a great blessing to us. I pray from my heart that the Neufeld family may continue to serve and praise God in any ministries in Japan and in the world.

Also, I'm sorry to say this about me, but God is doing a lot of new things for me. As I testified in last April, when I was disappointed that my re-entry was denied, I dreamt that I was having a barbecue in our church yard with the Mennonite Japanese Church members. I woke up with tears in my eyes, but I was so sad that I was still crying even after. But then, about two years later, I was able to worship and praise our God with you like this. God did a new thing for me after I lost my praise and restored my praise. Also, Rie-san and Gerald-sensei are moving near my house, which is a new thing that I never imagined. I am a lonely foreigner with no relatives in Japan, so just having them close by is a great encouragement to me. What I have learned in the past few years is that walking with hope in God will never end in disappointment.

How about you? Are you expecting God to do something new? It is easy to be reluctant to do new things when we are struggling with illness, nursing, unemployment, and other financial hardships and so on. However, God wants to do something new for us. Let us all look to God to do new and the best for us.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, how thankful we are that you created us to praise you. All the time You do all the good things for us. We thank you from now on and we look to God to do new things for us personally, and to do new things for Mennonite Japanese Church. Please guide us in our future and lead us to worship you with praise in any circumstances. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Reference

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2. Isaiah 43: The Study Bible, New Common Translation, 2014, p1131.
3. Understanding the Bible, by John R. W. Stott., by Seisyo Domei in Japan, 2019.