

May 23rd, 2021  
Immanuel United Church



**This week, we invite you to our Asian Heritage Month worship service** that focuses on the United Churches of Japanese-Canadian background. These churches have had a rich though sometimes troubled journey. This service was written by David Kai, a third-generation Canadian of Japanese descent (*Sansei*) who grew up attending the Toronto Japanese United Church.

**Please visit the introductory page of “East of the Rockies” and watch the trailer and vidoes (if inspired, search “East of the Rockies” on YouTube), before you begin worship, by reading or zoom, this week.**

**Introduction:** [https://www.nfb.ca/interactive/east\\_of\\_the\\_rockies/](https://www.nfb.ca/interactive/east_of_the_rockies/)

**Watch the trailer**  <https://youtu.be/L6CAQZgAoX0>

An interactive narrative AR experience told from the perspective of a 17-year-old girl forced from her home and made to live in BC’s Slocan Japanese internment camp during the Second World War.

**For more experience, you can play this YouTube video.** (Total 18 minutes).

 [https://youtu.be/rno6\\_Qbgon4?t=23](https://youtu.be/rno6_Qbgon4?t=23)

While watching, please kindly disregard the unnecessary captions in the video.



**We are also very glad to continue journeying with the worksheet # 3, “Learning about God through Spirit”, of the Intergenerational Theological Reflection Project.**

“In the Old Testament, **Spirit** is understood as an attribute and agent of God...

**indicating God’s presence...**

Invisible

Inexplicable

Irresistable

The Hebrew word for spirit, *ruah*, is also the word for “breath” or “wind”.

**Ruah is God’s breath, an indication of God’s presence.**

Ruah can be forceful or gentle - a gale force wind or a gentle breeze.” (P.1)

Welcome

Call to Worship: ***Our God Goes With Us***

— a hymn written for the Centennial-Japanese United Church

<https://youtu.be/jQ9ilNYaAR8>

“Our God Goes with Us,” tune: Lemon Creek

Chorus: **Our God goes with us wherever we may roam,  
Our God goes with us, makes each new place our home,  
As God goes with us we live by faith, not fear,  
Thanks be to God, ever 'fore us, ever near.**

**1. The Spirit moved, blew boats across the sea,**  
Brooded in hearts that struggled to be free,  
New life, new faith, new challenges to dare,  
Through blood, sweat, toil, bitter tears, our God was there. (Chorus)

**2. The Spirit wept as hatred's flames were fanned,**  
As trains of tears streamed from the promised land,  
In lonely mountain paths our God was found,  
Faith, hope, and love making ghost towns holy ground. (Chorus)

**3. The Spirit urged, go forth and start anew,**  
Rebuild my church, a sanctuary true,  
Welcomed by friends, their paths entwined as one,  
Stronger united with ev'ry rising sun. (Chorus)

**4. The Spirit leads; the future, still unknown,**  
Is not to fear, we trust in God alone,  
Be with us still as we move on again,  
Strengthen, inspire us, our Saviour and our Friend. (Chorus)

Prayer:

**Gracious God,**

**We are thankful to be here in your sanctuary.**

**Please receive our worship and praise,  
and fill us with your joy.**

**Empower us with your great Spirit  
so that we walk together with our siblings,**

**who are longing for your justice and peace.  
In Jesus 'name we pray. Amen.**

Scripture:

**Micah 6:1-8 What God requires**

Hear what the Living One says: Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Living One, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for the Lord has a controversy with God's people, and God will contend with Israel. "O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

"With what shall I come before the Living One, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before God with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Living One be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

**Acts 10:34-42 All are acceptable to God**

Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to God. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead.

The Choir Anthem: ***What Can I Do?***

Message: **Our God Goes with Us**

(Written by David Kai, a diaconal minister in United Church of Canada and the composer of the hymn, We Are a Rainbow. <https://youtu.be/48rinNWfFgk>)

During our message today, we will be singing parts of the hymn "Our God Goes with Us." This hymn was written for the Centennial-Japanese United Church in Toronto on the occasion of their move from their church building. In this hymn, the work of the Spirit is depicted in Japanese-Canadian history and the ongoing story that led to the formation of the Toronto Japanese United Church and its eventual amalgamation with the Centennial United Church. The

chorus affirms that no matter where we go and whatever the future holds, we need not fear, for God goes with us and before us. Let us begin by singing the chorus, first verse, and chorus of “Our God Goes with Us.”  <https://youtu.be/jQ9iINYaAR8>

*Hymn: “Our God Goes with Us” (chorus, verse 1, and chorus)*

***The Spirit moved, blew boats across the sea,  
Brooded in hearts that struggled to be free,  
New life, new faith, new challenges to dare,  
Through blood, sweat, toil, bitter tears, our God was there. (Chorus)***

The story of the Japanese-Canadian United Churches begins on the west coast of Canada. **God was with the new immigrants as the Spirit “blew boats across the sea,”** and they came to a strange, new land starting in the latter part of the 19th century. God was with the Methodist Church that took to heart our reading from Acts that tells us that all people are acceptable to God and valued as God’s children. The Methodist Church, one of the precursors of The United Church of Canada, established missions to the new Canadians in the growing “Japantown” on the east side of Vancouver. A congregation was established at the Powell Street Methodist Church, later called the Powell Street United Church. Many Japanese-Canadians were receptive to the Christian message, and also grateful for the help with lodgings, education, and other practical matters that the ministers and mission workers provided. As the population grew, other Japanese-language churches were established in the greater Vancouver area. However, as the community grew, it still faced many barriers based on race. People of Japanese ancestry, whether born in Canada or not, were not given the right to vote or to enter many professions. Schools were segregated for many years. Racist and opportunistic politicians were more than willing to make Asians the scapegoat of economic or social problems. The Second World War gave them the opportunity to rid themselves of what they considered “The Japanese Problem.”

*Hymn: “Our God Goes with Us” (verse 2 and chorus)*

***The Spirit wept as hatred’s flames were fanned,  
As trains of tears streamed from the promised land,  
In lonely mountain paths our God was found,  
Faith, hope, and love making ghost towns holy ground. (Chorus)***

Soon after the declaration of war with Japan, an exclusion zone for Japanese-Canadians was established from the coast to 100 miles inland. Their boats, cars, houses, businesses, and properties were confiscated and never returned. Families gathered from outside the Vancouver area were housed in the squalid conditions of the animal stalls of the Pacific National Exhibition grounds while awaiting transfer. Adult males were sent to work camps to build roads, many of them in northern Ontario. Some opted to stay together as families and work in the harsh conditions of sugar beet farms in the prairies, while the rest were to be sent to hastily built internment camps and ghost towns. Taking only what possessions they could carry, Japanese-

Canadians were herded onto trains headed to the interior of British Columbia. Encouraged by the United Church, there was some attempt to keep people of similar religion and denomination together for the sake of cohesion and leadership within the community. Some internment centres had a larger proportion of Buddhist and Anglican church members, while others like Lemon Creek and Kaslo had a larger number of United Church members and adherents.

God was with them not only in spirit but also through the United Church presence in the persons of ministers such as the Reverends Kosaburo Shimizu and Takashi Komiyama, and mission workers such as Constance Chappell and Neta Sadler, who came to help in the internment camps. Soon, thriving Japanese-Canadian churches were operating in camps and ghost towns such as Lemon Creek and Kaslo.

The people of the United Churches in these mountain camps and towns found their faith tempered in the crucible of the wartime years. In the United Church they found safe, sacred spaces and created loving communities that continued long after they were dispersed, becoming the foundation of Japanese-Canadian United Churches in cities across Canada. And so the mountains became a holy place, a place where faith grew and blossomed in spite of, or perhaps in part due to, the troubled times the internees experienced. As the hymn states,

In lonely mountain paths our God was found,  
Faith, hope and love making ghost towns holy ground.

*Hymn: "Our God Goes with Us" (verse 3 and chorus)*

***The Spirit urged, go forth and start anew,  
Rebuild my church, a sanctuary true,  
Welcomed by friends, their paths entwined as one,  
Stronger united with ev'ry rising sun. (Chorus)***

With the end of the war, the internees faced another unjust ultimatum: move east of the Rockies or face deportation to Japan. The majority gravitated to larger centres like Toronto, Montreal, Hamilton, and Winnipeg. As internees left the ghost towns and camps, United Church deaconesses and ministers assisted them in finding housing, employment, and church connections in new cities. In their new surroundings, Japanese-Canadians in general sought to become as assimilated and integrated as possible. They did not try to establish ethnic neighbourhoods, and most adopted more Anglo-Saxon sounding nicknames. As the saying goes, "It's the nail that sticks up that gets hit on the head."

It was the original intention that English-speaking Japanese-Canadians should assimilate and attend their local United Churches; however, few felt comfortable doing so. As a result, English services and congregations were established for the second-generation Nisei and their Sansei children, and these churches thrived through the baby boom years. They were places not only with extended family ties but also ties with friends who had become like family; warm and safe places to be a part of and grow in faith, where one could find loving community and true sanctuary.

Hymn: "Our God Goes with Us" (verse 4 and chorus)  
**The Spirit leads; the future, still unknown,  
Is not to fear, we trust in God alone,  
Be with us still as we move on again,  
Strengthen, inspire us, our Saviour and our Friend. (Chorus)**

As the number of Nisei and Sansei members decline, the future of the Japanese-Canadian United churches is less clear. Some congregations have come up with innovative solutions. Montreal Japanese United Church has now become a multiracial, multilingual, intercultural church with members from many other cultural backgrounds joining the Japanese-Canadian founders. The Toronto Japanese United Church (Nisei) amalgamated with its co-tenant congregation, Centennial United Church, and later amalgamated with Oriole-York Mills to form the new Bayview United Church. Such innovations are a hopeful sign that the work of the Japanese-Canadian United Churches will be carried forward into the future.

Although this hymn and message has focused on the history of Japanese-Canadian United Churches, there is a message here that applies to everyone. Our God is always with us; there is nowhere we can go where God is not present. God cannot be confined to any particular building, or to one church or another; wherever we may go, God is there.

Knowing that God goes with us gives us courage and strength in the midst of difficult times. As the people of Israel escaped from Egypt, God went before them like a pillar of cloud by day, like a pillar of fire by night. There is nowhere we can go that God has not already been; the way has been prepared. Our God is ever before us, going ahead of us, ever near.

Jesus said, "I will be with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). And so it is that "the future, still unknown, Is not to fear, we trust in God alone."

Our God goes with us. Thanks be to God.

Hymn: "Our God Goes with Us" (chorus)

**Chorus: Our God goes with us wherever we may roam,  
Our God goes with us, makes each new place our home,  
As God goes with us we live by faith, not fear,  
Thanks be to God, ever 'fore us, ever near.**

Hymn: VU 666 ***In Lonely Mountain Ways***

<https://youtu.be/t2Mqzo8dN8c>

"In Lonely Mountain Ways" is a favourite of many Japanese Christians. "In Lonely Mountain Ways" was written in 1903 by Japanese Christian educator Sugao Nishimura and seems particularly appropriate as we speak about Japanese-Canadian Christians on "mountain paths" in the interior of British Columbia. Although the melody is Western in origin, it has been adopted as being truly fitting for a Japanese hymn.

Prayers of the People:

*Ruah Elohim,*

Your Spring breath enliven us.

Holy Spirit, breathe peace and new life into everyone. Bless all people to work together as one family of God and to be compassionate to one another.

God, we pray for all those who are suffering from the spread of COVID-19, and we ask your healing touch that they may receive care in their time of need. We pray for all those who have put themselves at the service of their communities. We ask for courage and protection for frontline workers risking their well-being for the sake of others, and for all teachers and parents imparting their wisdom and dedication to the learning and growth of students and children through remote-learning.

We pray for those in sickness, bringing them to you who understand people's fear and pain before we speak of them. Surround the frightened with your tenderness, give strength to those in pain and isolation, hold the weak in your arms of love, and give hope and patience to those who are recovering.

*Ruah Elohim,*

We give you thanks for the gift of life.

May your spring breath enliven us today. Amen.

Hymn: MV 1 ***Let Us Build a House*** (V. 1, 4, 5)

*Let us build a house where love can dwell and all can safely live, a place where saints and children tell how hearts learn to forgive. Built of hopes and dreams and visions, rock of faith and vault of grace; here the love of Christ shall end divisions: All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.*

*Let us build a house where hands will reach beyond the wood and stone to heal and strengthen, serve and teach, and live the Word they've known. Here the outcast and the stranger bear the image of God's face; let us bring an end to fear and danger: All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.*

*Let us build a house where all are named, their songs and visions heard and loved and treasured, taught and claimed as words within the Word. Built of tears and cries and laughter, prayers of faith and songs of grace; let this house proclaim from floor to rafter: All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.*

Benediction:

**God of the here and now, be with us.**

**God of fresh starts and sunrises, guide us forward.**

**God of thunderstorms and rainbows, hold us close.**

**God of today and tomorrow,**

**Renew us with your love. Amen.**