

Come, Let Us Worship: Worshipful Life

Colossians 3: 1-17

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (3:17).

Ikuo Takizawa, KBF Sermon

Good morning.

Let us pray.

Today, we will continue with the series of come let us worship.

Two Sundays ago, I was in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, to attend a conference on the role of business sector in improving health in Africa. Since I arrived early in the morning and the conference was due to start on Monday, I decided to visit a local church.

Ethiopia is known for its tradition of Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which dates back to the ancient times. I think many of you remember the story of Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 who got baptized by Philip the evangelist. According to Prof Wiki (which I rely on too much), the Kingdom of Axum, which centered in today's Eritrea and the northern part of Ethiopia, adopted Christianity as its state religion as early as in 330AD. The Romans adopted Christianity as the state religion in 380AD, therefore, Ethiopia has longer tradition of Christianity than Europe. In fact, it is one of the oldest countries to adopt Christianity as state religion, second only to Armenia. Looking around the globe, I am simply amazed by the vastness and richness of the Gospel, and the blessings that we believe and worship the same Father, Son and Holy Spirit, even when we are so far apart in space and in time.

But the church I went for Sunday service was not the Orthodox, but rather contemporary one. It is called BEZA International Church (slide 1). It started as a small home group in 2005 and now it has grown to attract more than a thousand people, with various ministries for the professionals, youths and children, including outreach for the street children. They have English service from 11:15 to 13:00, of which first full one hour is dedicated for singing and

praising, which is quite normal for African churches. I always enjoy the extended time of singing and praising in African churches, not necessarily because of the loud music and drum beats, but the sense of being filled with joy of worshipping God with entire being.

Many of us associate worship with singing and praising. I have to confess that I did before preparing this message. Probably these images I found on the net are the typical picture many of us think of when we talk about worship (slide 2). If you google by Japanese word 賛美 (sambi), you even find this (slide 3). We associate worship so much with singing, which I do not think is a bad thing.

I enjoy worshipping God through singing, with the brothers and sisters in Christ. There is a off-spring group from the Yoyogi Ministry for the Homeless, called Mobile Church. After the main service on every Saturday morning, a small group of people, usually less than 10, stays on and we sing worship songs together and share testimonies, in the middle of Yoyogi Park for about 2 hours, including fellowship over a cup of coffee.

There is no special sound effects except for one acoustic guitar, no light except for the bright sun. When it rains we worship under the crossover bridge. We are not as good as the worship teams in KBF in following the notes and rhythms. Yet every time I join the worship, I feel so much joy and peace at heart, as I can sense so clearly the love for God and the love for each other.

However, we need to be careful not to perceive the worship as merely singing and praising in the church or even in the park. Let me share with you one interesting image I found on the net (slide 4). I have not read the book or any of his writing so I do not really endorse what he says about worship and I do not go into detail about this image, but I found this quite interesting and relevant in rethinking our perception of worship.

Now, last month we learned about the Kingdom of Heaven. Here is one question; what do we do when we are in the Kingdom of Heaven? We worship! Because we will enjoy the constant presence of God and the intimate and undisturbed relationship with Him when we are in heaven. We will worship God with entire being, not limited to the songs and praises on Sunday morning. Everything you do will be an act of worship. The life in the Kingdom of Heaven will be a “worshipfull life.”

We, Christians, need to prepare ourselves for the worshipfull life to come while we are here in this world. This morning, I would like to look through the first half

of the Colossians Ch 3 to see what the worshipful life in this world should look like.

Before going into detail, I would like to take a moment to look at the context in which this letter was written, in order to avoid cherry-picking of the verses based on our selfish understanding and expectations, rather than what God expects us to receive from Him through the Words.

This letter was written by Paul to the believers in Colossae whose faith was affected by the false teachers. Those teachers were teaching things described as “hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depended on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ. (2:8)” So they were substituting teachings of Jesus with something else. Against such background, Paul was encouraging the Colossians to “continue in their faith, established and firm and not to move from the hope held out in the gospel (1:23)” by remembering how they heard and truly understood God’s grace (1:6).

He condemned the false teachings which involved such as “do not handle, do not taste, do not touch (2:21),” most likely the legalistic teachings originated in the Jewish traditions. They were “based merely on human commands and teachings (2:22)” and even though they might appear effective, in reality they were “self-imposed worship” and “had no power over our selfish desires (2:23).” They were not true worshiping of God.

The 3rd chapter of the Colossians, which we are going to look at in detail, begins with “Since, then, (3:1).” Following the condemnation of the false teachings and the false worship, Paul provides very practical instructions how we, being saved by God’s grace, should live up to the standard of Christian life, truly worshiping God. In chapter 3, Paul provides instructions on 4 spheres, personal life (3:5-10), church life (3:11-17), family life (3:18-21) and social life (3:22-4:1), but I will focus on the first two, as they are very relevant for what I described as worshipful life. There are 8 very important and practical instructions. Let us take a look, one by one.

1. Set our hearts and minds on things above.

(Slide 5)

(Scripture 3:1-4) Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also

will appear with him in glory.

Setting our hearts and minds on things above, the living Christ, is the first step we should do to prepare ourselves for worshipful life, here in this world. We experience, even with the earthly things, that setting clear goals and targets helps us to make serious effort, often times sacrificing other earthly pleasures. It may be high school or college exam, and you may study so hard devoting your time staying away from games or other school activities. It can be obtaining a job or new qualifications, staying away from drinking or spending less time with your friends or family. For some, it may be savings for purchasing something expensive or for big life events, such as purchasing a house, wedding, supporting college fees of the children, or preparation for retirement.

We may do the similar goal setting even in the church too, with the various ministries we are involved in, like we should aim for this and that. While such goal setting may help us focus our efforts, counting on the earthly things will be dangerous as we can easily be irritated when we fail to reach the target, or when something, or someone, gets in the way. As Christians, we should set our hearts and minds on the ultimate goal, which is the Kingdom of Heaven, not to be distracted by the worldly things, teachings and values.

We may not notice but we are dead already, as popular cartoon character of my generation often said (slide 6). (He is Kenshiro of Hokuto no Ken. He is a master of martial arts and he could kill his opponent in an instant before he could even notice the person is dead already! Apologies for unbiblical use of example. Please do not be distracted by the earthly thing and forget to set your minds on the Kingdom of Heaven...)

Our true lives are hidden in the Kingdom of Heaven with Jesus since the time we accepted Him as our savior. And our true lives will be revealed in the end together with Jesus in glory, the same glory as Jesus, no matter how rough and miserable our lives on this earth can be. As believers in Christ, we share the same goal. Isn't it wonderful?

There are so many things that distract our eyes from Jesus. Money, goods, power, pleasure of the flesh, hardships and challenges of this world, and false teachings and rituals. But we should seek first the Kingdom of God. Setting our hearts and minds should be the beginning of worshipful life.

But setting our hearts and minds right is not the end of the story. Setting the

Kingdom of Heaven as our ultimate goal is important, but we should not wait until we enter there just sitting and doing nothing. Jesus told us to pray “may your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.” This is not a wishful thinking. He wants to bring the Kingdom of Heaven on this earth and he wants us to seek it from our hearts. We believers should be seekers of the Kingdom, not the passive seekers of wait and see, but the active ones who join the work of Jesus.

How can we do that? Let us see what Paul has to say.

2. Take off the old selves

(Slide 7)

(Scripture 3:5-11) Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid of yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

After setting our hearts and minds right on the Kingdom of Heaven, we need to take off our old selves, the old beliefs and old behaviors. Paul lists 2 sets of five qualities here as something we need to take off as old selves. The first set is sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed. The second set is anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language. Some Bible scholars say the first set represents things harmful to ourselves while the second set is things harmful to or hurt others. Others say the first set represents things related to our bodily integrity, while the second set represents the integrity of our hearts.

For many, including myself, it is not easy to take off the habitual thinking and behavior as we are so much attached to them over time. I am becoming 50 next month and I used to think such things as evil desires and greed will disappear as I become older, say over 50. But believe me, they don't! When I was young, men over 50 looked like so wise and completely different human being from what I was, like looking up to my father and mother. Now I am becoming 50 and look, what is big deal about it? I am still struggling with the old desires and greed. As for the second set of qualities to be taken off, how often I still regret with the unkind words I uttered to my colleagues, friends and to my family which

came out of my anger and rage. It may be different when I grow even older, perhaps? I would like to ask our senior members what it is like...

But however difficult it is, we as the followers of Christ, should and must take off the old selves, not by our own strength, but with the help of the Holy Spirit. He can renew ourselves in the image of the creator God, in the image of Jesus.

Please allow me to use another unbiblical example here (Slide 8). Probably many of you have heard about 断捨離 (dan sha ri) and how popular it is in Japan now. If you do not know 断捨離, you may have heard about Kon Mari, as she is very popular even in US through the Netflix program called *Tidying Up with Marie Kondo*. She is basically promoting the same line of thinking as 断捨離 or what is often called minimalism life style.

Now 断捨離 can be literally translated as to block, dispose and separate. It means to block useless things or ideas to come in, to dispose such things and get rid of them, and to separate oneself from them to avoid temptation. Maybe we need to practice 断捨離 of worldly thinking and practice with the help not from Kon Mari or consultants of this world, but from the Holy Spirit. Again, we need to set our hearts and minds clearly on things above, Jesus, otherwise such practice is meaningless.

While you are struggling to take off your old clothes, it is important to know that your neighbors, including the brothers and sisters in the church, are also struggling with the same process. Please do not try to forcefully take off the old clothes of the others! You know how hard it is yourself. Please pray for the help of the Holy Spirit, so that the Spirit can work gently on the person, and on yourself, too.

As we take off the old selves, the barriers and walls which divide us will be taken away and we will be one body under Christ.

3.Put on the new selves

(Slide 9)

(Scripture 3:12-13) **Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.**

After taking off the old selves, we need to put on the new ones. Paul lists again five qualities, this time positive ones to be put on. They are; compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

They are the qualities of Jesus which He demonstrated for us while He was on the earth. He was compassionate to the people marginalized in the society, the poor, the captives, the disabled, and the oppressed.

In Luke chapter 4:18, He started His ministry by reading from the Isaiah 61 “The Spirit of Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

He was kind in feeding His hungry followers. He was humble to wash the feet of the disciples. He was gentle with Peter even when he denied Jesus three times. He was patient to go through all the pain and humiliation on the cross because of our sins.

Our identity is with Jesus. We are chosen, holy and dearly loved by Him. We should demonstrate the same qualities in the church and beyond the church. Now we are instructed to put them on as outfits, so that the people around us can see them. Don’t hesitate to show compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, through your words and deeds. Don’t think they are meaningless or hypocritical. You are told to be the light of the world, and the salt of the earth.

4.Put on love

(Slide 10)

(Scripture 3:14) And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

On top of these good qualities, we need to put on love. Love will bind them together in perfect unity. Love is so powerful as to “cover over a multitude of sins (1Peter 4:8).”

Let me come back to the 5 qualities to be put on. Compassion means to feel the pain and misery of others as your own, from the guts. Kindness enables you to do good to the others. You need these two qualities to actively reach out and

engage with the people around you who need your help. Compassion and kindness give you power to act.

On the other hand, gentleness means not to be provoked easily even when you are insulted or discouraged, and patience will help you endure in hope. You need these two qualities not to be upset or even disappointed when your efforts do not produce fruits immediately in the people you are engaged with. Gentleness and patience give you wisdom to wait.

You need humility, liking these two, the power to act and the wisdom to wait in the middle, because humility helps us to know both the power and the wisdom come from the Holy Spirit, not us. We should not boast our compassion and kindness, or gentleness and patience.

As such, these qualities need to be bound together in perfect harmony, to be put on nicely. It is love, coming from Jesus, which does the trick.

Many of you must have experience like this: you were moved by compassion and determined to show kindness to someone around you in need, probably by sharing the gospel. But the change you saw in the person was slow or unnoticeable, or worse, the person resisted your compassion and kindness and started attacking you. You had to be gentle and patient with the person. Through the process you learned what it meant to be humble, realizing that it was not you but the Holy Spirit, who could really touch the heart and transform the person. I went through such experience myself working with the homeless people.

Without love, compassion may turn into arrogance, like “I am doing it for you (and you should be grateful for me).” Without love, kindness may be used to feel good about yourself, not for the people you are serving. Without love, gentleness may make you blind to the things which are wrong and should not be accepted. Without love, patience may end up in forsaking of hope. Without love, humility may be used as an excuse for weakness not to act when it is necessary.

Since God is love, we need to check constantly if our words or deeds, seemingly of the good qualities, are actually coming from and bound to love, Jesus.

5. Let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts

(Slide 11)

(Scripture 3:15a) **Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.**

As the followers of Christ, we are called to make peace. Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God (Mat 5:9).” Looking around, we find so many tensions and frictions, minor conflict of opinions developing into serious contentions and eventually into harsh combat. It is happening in our personal relationships, and also in international relationships. The political contentions between Japan and Korea, the economic contentions between US and China. Civil wars taking place in many parts of the world.

In the conference I attended in Ethiopia, one of the participants said rightly about the current outbreak of Ebola Virus Diseases which has killed more than 2,000 people in Democratic Republic of Congo, that there was an issue of Ebola as virus, Ebola as health systems, Ebola as security and the last one is most difficult to tackle. The outbreak is taking place in politically unstable area of eastern DRC. There have been frequent attacks on health care facilities by the rebels and militias, followed by intermission of control activities and increase in disease incidence.

We need to let the peace of Christ rule in our own hearts so that we can have an impact on such a contentious world.

I want to highlight here that we are called to make peace not as individually but as a church, as members of one body. And the church begins in our own family. We need to let the peace of Christ rule among “our” hearts, not limited to your own. You cannot say like “what I am doing is right because this way I feel peace of mind and I do not care how you feel about it.” We are called to make peace jointly, in our family and in our church. Our family and the church should be the foundation of peacemaking.

6.Be thankful

(Slide 12)

(Scripture 3:15b) **And be thankful.**

Psalmist says in Psalm 100 that “Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name (Psa 100:4).” Our worship and praise should be a thanks giving response to what has been so generously provided by God, the salvation in Jesus. In the Mobile Church of Yoyogi, we share our own testimonies how God is working so graciously and mercifully in our lives in between the songs. Remembering His grace and mercy helps us sing truly in thanksgiving.

7.Let the Words live among us richly

(Slide 13)

(Scripture 3:16) *Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.*

At the first glance, it looks like Paul specifically talks about the worship in a church setting here. We are gathered here every Sunday morning to teach and guide each other with God's wisdom, not only from the message but also from the songs we sing with thankful hearts. It is true that all of what we do have to be based on the message of Christ. Self-imposing worship or singing just to feel good about yourselves without focusing on Christ and without thanksgiving to God is out of question.

I would like to invite your attention to the following two things, however. First is that message of Christ is not limited to what he said in words. He conveyed His message through how He lived while he was on this earth, as a perfect human. It includes all the qualities Paul listed; compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, and above all, love. When we teach and guide each other and sing praise to God in the church, we need to demonstrate those qualities through our deeds as well.

The second is that the teaching of God's wisdom and singing in thanks giving does not have to be confined in a church setting. It can take place in our home, our school, our workplace or our community, or anywhere we are sent, as long as we let the message of Christ live in ourselves richly. Worship is not only about how you sing and praise, nor about how you organize your Sunday morning service, but as Lorne said in the last week's message, how to align your entire life with the message of Christ, through your words and your deeds.

8.Do everything in the name of Jesus

(Slide 14)

(Scripture 3:17) *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

This is the summary by Paul how the Christian should live in this world. Whatever we do, whether in word or deed, we must do it in the name of Jesus. That is the secret of true worship. That is the secret of worshipful life.

(Slide 15)

Paul continues on with teaching on the family order and social order in Colossians Ch.3, which are also important elements of worshipful life. But what is taught can be controversial for some, like my own home, so I would like to leave it up to the professional preachers! But I sincerely hope you received message from God which were relevant to you today.

Let us pray.