

Our God Goes with Us

Asian Heritage Month Worship

Our Asian Heritage Month worship service this year 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.

Attached Resources

- Scales sheet: Major scale, Pentatonic scale, Hirajoshi mode scale
- Hymn: "Our God Goes with Us"

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- Photo: Powell Street United Church

Other Resources

- "East of the Rockies" National Film Board app simulates the conditions of internment: www.nfb.ca/interactive/east_of_the_rockies/
- "A Ghost Town Tour" video presentation: <https://youtu.be/rabJPKuXazA>

We Gather to Worship

Acknowledgement of the Land

As we gather here today on the traditional land of the _____ people, we remember their stewardship of the land and their willingness to live in harmony with their neighbours. We remember also the pain of stolen land, broken promises, and forgotten treaties.

As we gather here today, we remember also those who came to this land from around the world, some seeking opportunity, some seeking safety and asylum, some brought against their will. We celebrate all who came to make Canada their home, but we remember that all were not given equal welcome or equal treatment in this land.

Today on this Sunday when we celebrate Asian Heritage Month, we remember in particular the story of Canadian Christians of Japanese heritage who have their own unique part in this country's history and in The United Church of Canada.

Introduction to the Hymn

Our first hymn 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.

Hymn

"In Lonely Mountain Ways" (*Voices United* 666)

Opening Prayer

Creating and Loving God, today we thank you for the many different peoples of your world. Help us to live together with respect for all creation, including the human family. Help us to love one another and to honour the unique gifts of each person.

Forgive us when we judge others by our own standards, forgetting that your ways are not our ways and that You love all people. Forgive us when we prejudge those who are different from ourselves. Teach us your ways of love and justice, that we might be the human family as you intended; that we might be bringers of your kin-dom.

A Time of Silence for Personal Prayer

Words of Assurance

One: Let us hear these Words of Assurance. In Christ we can be freed from the burdens of prejudice and ignorance. In Christ we are a new creation.

Many: Thanks be to God!

A Conversation with the Children

(Ask for the help of a church musician for this conversation. If a flute player, or even a player of the shakuhachi or koto, is available, that would be wonderful as well.)

How many of you know about music and scales? Do you know the do, re, mi scale?
(Demonstrate yourself or have the musician play.)

That scale has seven different notes, but many scales have just five notes. These are called pentatonic scales. *(Demonstrate a major pentatonic scale.)*

Many songs, especially folk songs, use pentatonic scales. Here are few examples.

(Musician plays melody of "Oh Susannah," "Amazing Grace," "In Lonely Mountain Ways." Ask children if they recognize the tunes as they are played.)

Did you recognize the last one? That was the hymn we sang a few minutes ago.

Now here's a scale that is often used in music in Japan. *(Hirajoshi scale is played.)*

What do you think of that scale? Does it sound a little sad? Maybe that's because it's in a minor key. There's a famous Japanese song called "Sakura" that uses that scale. Sakura means "cherry blossom," and this song celebrates the blooming of cherry blossoms in the spring.

(Musician plays the "Sakura" tune.)

Music from around the world uses different kinds of sounds and scales, but each is beautiful in its own way. Let's sing a hymn from Japan that uses that Japanese tune; it's called "Praise to God."

Hymn

"Praise to God" (VU 243)

Listening for God's Word

Micah 6: 1–8 What God requires

Acts 10: 34–43 All are acceptable to God

Message: Our God Goes with Us (starts on page 4)

Hymn

(Parts of this hymn will be sung throughout the message. It would be good to have the words printed in the bulletin or projected onto a screen—see the end of this file.)

“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)

Responding to God's Word

Offering

Offertory

“What Can I Do?” (*More Voices* 191)

“We Praise You, O God” (VU 218, verse 1)

Prayers for the Family of God and Lord's Prayer

God, in your love, **hear our prayer.**

Loving God, we give thanks for all that we have learned from you. Help us to learn to love as you have loved us. Help us to grow beyond narrow views that regard the stranger as an enemy and restrict the scope of your love. Give us instead the embracing love of Jesus, who lived and died that the whole world might be saved. Show us a new path—a path not divided by race or creed, but a path united by love, goodwill, and a concern for the good of

all.

God, in your love, **hear our prayer.**

And so we pray for peace in a world marred by violence,
we pray for unity in a world divided by class, borders, race, and religion,
we pray for hope in a world that often seems short on good news,
we pray for comfort in a world that seems full of tears.

God, in your love, **hear our prayer.**

Holy God, you have given us your peace—but not as the world gives have you given to us.

You have given us the peace of Christ that disturbs us;

you have given us a Spirit of restlessness that stirs us from placidness;

you have given us a vision of peace that turns us from shaking our heads and asking,
“Why?” and moves us to ask instead, “Why not?”

Help us to move toward that vision.

God, in your love, **hear our prayer.**

God, hear our prayers for those who suffer oppression and discrimination
and for those whose lives are narrowed because they oppress and discriminate.

We pray for all who lack the necessities of life: not only food, clothing, and shelter but also
acceptance, respect, and dignity. And God, hear our silent prayers for the many needs and
concerns that weigh heavily on our hearts. (*silent prayer*)

God in your love, **Hear our prayer.**

This we pray to you, our Parent God, you who are as Our Mother and

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

**Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us.**

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,

Forever and ever. Amen.

Hymn

“Let Us Build a House” (MV 1)

“Wherever You May Go” (MV 216)

Blessing

Message: Our God Goes with Us

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.”

Hymn: “Our God Goes with Us” (chorus, verse 1, and 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. (*Photo of Powell Street United Church building could be shown here—see below.*) 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)

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)

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)

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)

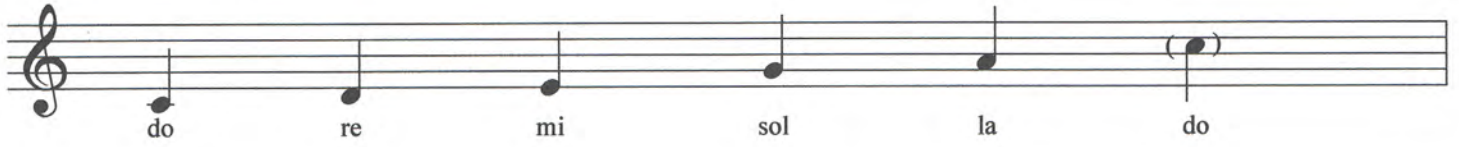
David Kai is a retired diaconal minister and an active musician/composer; you can find him on Facebook or www.sites.google.com/site/davidwkaismusic

Scales

Major



Pentatonic Major



Hirajoshi mode



Our God Goes With Us

Words and music: David Kai ©2005

Tune: Lemon Creek

♩ = 130

D D/C# Bm Bm/A G Em Asus4 A

Our God goes with us wher - e - ver we may roam,

The first system of music features a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is common time (C). The tempo is marked as quarter note = 130. The system contains eight measures of music. The vocal line starts with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note F#4, a quarter note E4, and a quarter note D4. The piano accompaniment consists of chords: D, D/C#, Bm, Bm/A, G, Em, Asus4, and A.

D D/C# Bm Bm/A G E/G# Asus4 A

Our God goes with us, makes each new place our home,


The second system of music continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note F#4, a quarter note E4, and a quarter note D4. The piano accompaniment consists of chords: D, D/C#, Bm, Bm/A, G, E/G#, Asus4, and A.

D D/C# Bm Bm/A G F# Bm Bm/A

As God goes with us we live by faith, not fear,

The third system of music concludes the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note F#4, a quarter note E4, and a quarter note D4. The piano accompaniment consists of chords: D, D/C#, Bm, Bm/A, G, F#, Bm, and Bm/A.

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Final time to 

Asus4

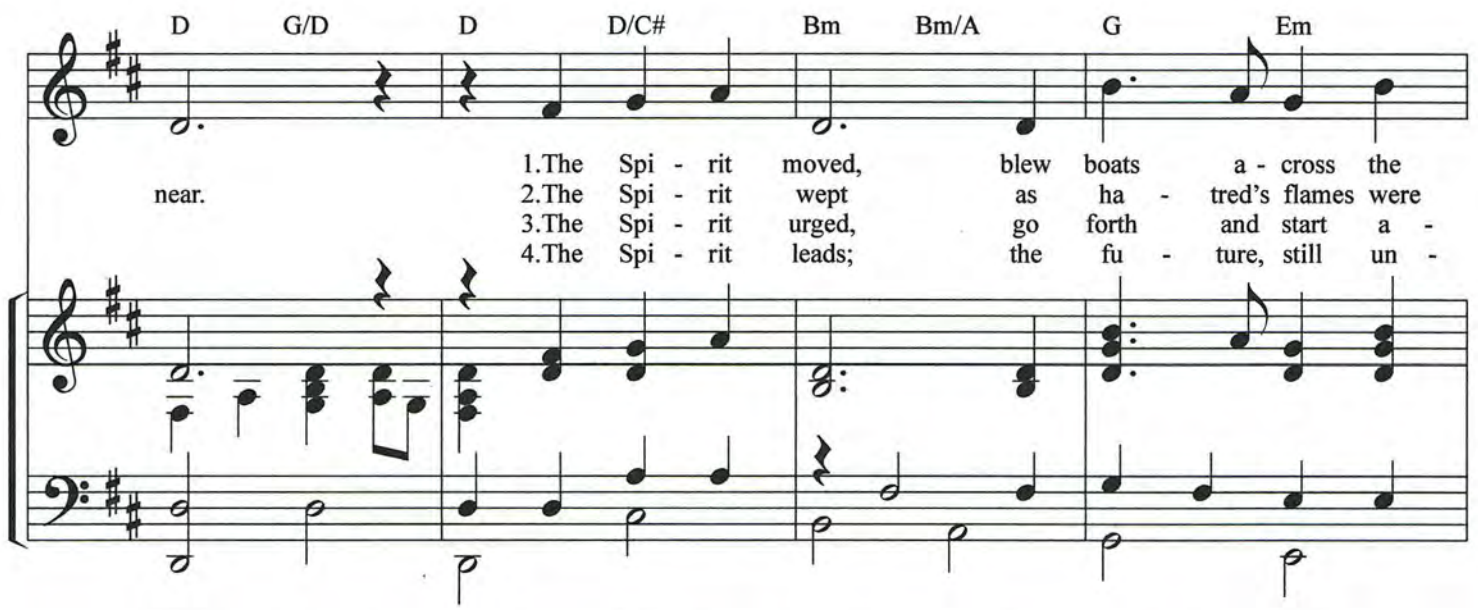
G A/G D/F# Bm Em D/F# G



Thanks be to God, e - ver 'fore us, e - ver

Final time to 

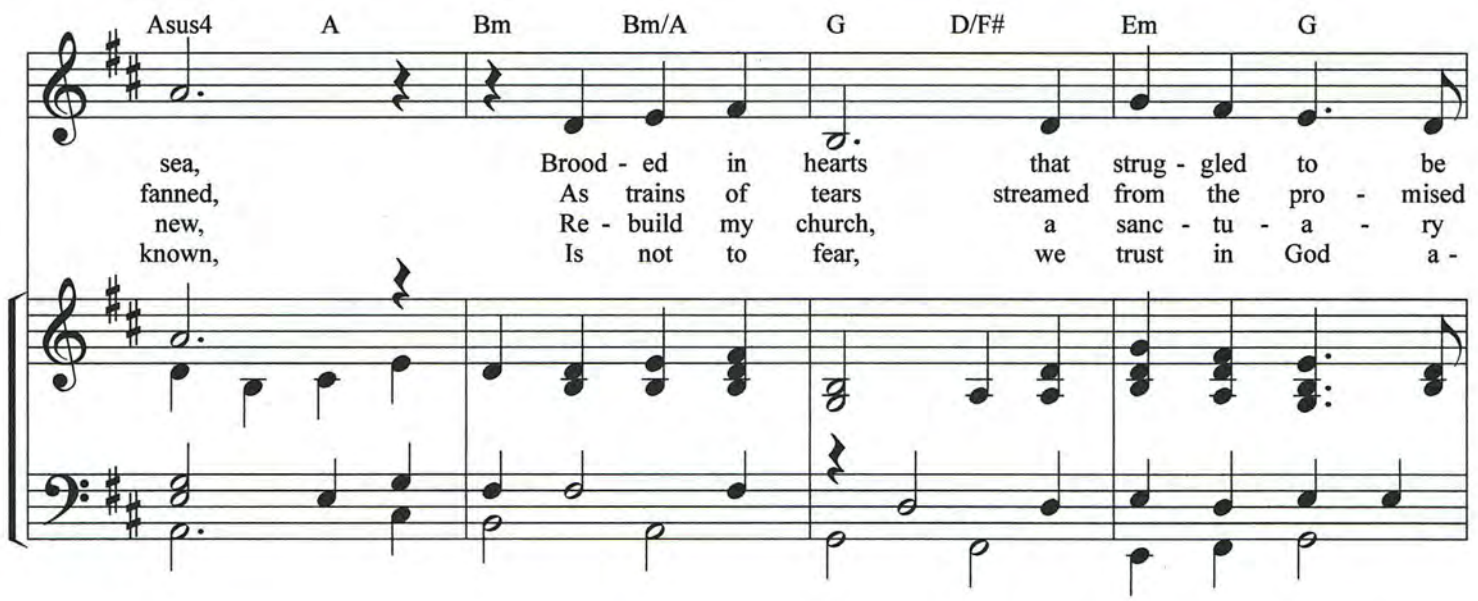
D G/D D D/C# Bm Bm/A G Em



near.

1. The Spi - rit moved, blew boats a - cross the
 2. The Spi - rit wept as ha - tred's flames were
 3. The Spi - rit urged, go forth and start a -
 4. The Spi - rit leads; the fu - ture, still un -

Asus4 A Bm Bm/A G D/F# Em G



sea, fanned, new, known,

Brood - ed in hearts that strug - gled to be
 As trains of tears streamed from the pro - mised
 Re - build my church, a sanc - tu - a - ry
 Is not to fear, we trust in God a -

Asus4 A D D/C# Bm Bm/A G F#

free, land, true, lone, New life, new faith, new chal - len - ges to
 In lone - ly moun - tain paths our God was
 Wel - comed by friends, their paths en - twined as
 Be with us still as we move on a -

Bm Bm/A G A/G D/F# Bm Em D/F#

dare, found, one, gain, Through blood, sweat, toil, bit - ter tears, our
 Faith, hope, and love ma - king ghost towns
 Strong - er u - ni - ted with e - v'ry
 Strength - en, in - spire us, our Sa - viour

G Asus4 D G/D D G/D D

God ho ri and was ly sing our there. ground. sun. Friend. near. rit.

Powell Street Methodist Church (later United Church), 1916



93.049P3736 Japanese Methodist Mission, Vancouver, 1916. The United Church of Canada Archives, Toronto. Used with permission.