

“The Power of Music”

[Psalm 150](#)

While I am certain that you do not remember the title of the sermon I preached at last year’s music Sunday, you might remember the name BTS, the South Korean boyband that I mentioned in it. I talked about how the group had made history by rising to the number-one spot on the Billboard 200 albums chart and also breaking into the Top 10 of the Hot 100 singles chart.

After last year's worship service, I received two different comments from worshipers about that particular sermon illustration. An older church member said, “Pastor, what was the name of the band you talked about? I have never heard of the name. Probably, no one else knew what you were talking about. You know we are mostly older people.” Then, another church member said, “Pastor, my daughter smiled when you were talking about BTS because she knew who they were. My son loves their music, too.”

With their global popularity continuing to rise, I'm sure more of us have heard of the name, BTS, or even heard one of their songs on the radio. In fact, because of their ARMY, which is an acronym for “Adorable Representative M.C. for Youth,” BTS is the most tweeted-about celebrity, with more than 20 million Twitter followers. Since last spring, BTS albums have hit the top of the U.S. charts two more times, becoming the first group since the Beatles to earn 3 number-one albums in less than a year. Usually, tickets for their concerts in major cities around the world are sold out instantly and are resold at higher premiums. By the way, they are in the middle of another world tour, and today they are holding the second day of a concert series at London's Wembley Stadium, which should be starting soon.

The BTS ARMY is passionate about the K-pop band and their songs. If you haven't done so yet, try to watch a BTS concert video on YouTube. You'll see a packed stadium of people singing along with the band. It's really fascinating to hear more than 60 thousand people singing in my native language, and I can tell you that their Korean pronunciation is pretty good!

This incredible global phenomenon of BTS fandom is a reminder to us that music is communal and universal. Music binds us together, and this happens across racial, cultural, religious and, yes, even linguistic barriers. Truly, as the American writer, Sarah Dessen said, “Music is the great uniter, an incredible force. Something that people who differ on everything and anything else can have in common.” Or, as the American music artist, Phillip Sweet, pointed out, “It’s interesting how music can knock down a wall and be an open connection between you and someone else where something else can’t. When music comes along, it just opens your heart a little more.”

Indeed, music is a powerful unifying force and an integral part of the human experience. So, it should not be surprising to find many biblical references of music playing a big role in the communal life of God’s people. Throughout the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, there is a strong emphasis on music, and we see strong support for its use in worship.

In the Old Testament, music was used in conjunction with different activities. Our ancestors of faith sang and played musical instruments at important events, as expressions of reverence, love and gratitude for God. And, their singing was often accompanied by dancing. Moses and the Israelites sang together a song of victory after escaping Pharaoh's army and safely crossing the Red Sea. Moses' sister, Miriam also sang, as she led women into singing and dancing. And Moses must have been a good singer because he chose to sing his farewell speech to his people.

King David was also well known for his musical gifts. When he was young, he played the harp to soothe King Saul whenever he became mentally disturbed. And a legacy of his kingship was the organization of a magnificent temple choir of 4,000 singers and musicians. Can you just imagine what the sound of their singing was like?

In its original form, the entire book of psalms was a book of songs. They were sung by individual believers, as well as communally in public settings. Biblical scholars believe that many parts of the books of prophets were not read, but sung as well.

Though music is not mentioned in the New Testament as much as in the Old Testament, we can assume that music played an important role in the life of the early church as well, since their roots were in the tradition of the Old Testament. And there are a handful of instances of singing during Jesus' time and the early church found in the New Testament.

Gospel writers recorded that Jesus and his disciples sang together after their last supper before they went out to the Mount of Olives. The book of Acts recorded that the apostle Paul and his ministry partner, Silas, sang praises to God while they were in prison. In his letters to the churches in the cities of Corinth, Ephesus and Colossae, Paul exhorted the early Christians to sing at their gatherings, specifically urging them to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

Revelation, the final book of the New Testament, has 16 different songs. Along with the 4 songs related to the birth of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, such as Mary's Song, Elizabeth's Song, the Angel's Song, and Simeon's Song, these songs in Revelation were probably among the hymns and spiritual songs Paul was urging the early Christians to sing at their gatherings.

And music continues to play an important role in the life of the church today. Our worship services begin and end with music. Today, the beautiful prelude music the Carillon Choir played on their bells prepared us for worship, and the postlude Shine will play on the organ at the end of the service will send us forth to the world as bold disciples of Jesus Christ. Each Sunday, we worship God with beautiful melodies of praise poured out from our lips and played on our musical instruments, as we embrace the great diversity of music that is there to honor God and stir our hearts to sing.

Music touches our minds and teaches us about our faith. Music calms our anxious hearts and fills them with hope. Music allows us to feel God's love for us and express our love for God. Music awakens a spiritual longing in the deepest corners of our hearts. Music positions us to better connect with God and with one another. Music helps us to be challenged and changed by the gospel. Indeed, music has the power to make a transformative difference in the life of the community of Christian believers.

And perhaps, that is why today's scripture reading, psalm 150, concludes the whole Book of Psalms with a call to praise, in other words, a call to music. The psalm starts and ends with the phrase, "Praise the Lord" which is repeated as "Praise God" many times in between. Here, the Hebrew word translated as "Praise the Lord" is *halayah*, and it consists of two words, "halal" and "yah." The first word means "praise," and the second is an abbreviated form of Yahweh, the name of God. As you can guess, the English word, "Hallelujah" comes from this word.

This short psalm of 6 verses not only calls us to praise God but also tells us where, why, how and who should praise God. First, praise God where? -- both in the sanctuary and in the firmament. In other words, praise God both in the church and out in the world wherever God's power reaches. We praise God on both in the church and out in the world. Praising God is not something we do once a week on Sunday, but everyday, anytime and anywhere in our daily living.

Second, praise God why? -- Because of God's mighty acts and also God's greatness. We praise God because what God has done for us. And we praise God simply because of who God is for us. We praise God because the God whom we know and continue to experience along our journeys of faith is faithful, steadfast, and loving to all generations. No matter what life brings our way, we know that God will always be here with us and for us. We know that God will always be in control.

Third, praise God how? -- with musical instruments and with dance. Imagine the sanctuary, filled with the sounds of all the musical instruments mentioned in the psalm - trumpet, flute, harp, all kinds of strings of violin, viola, cello, and double bass, pipe, and cymbals. And add to them, the bells, the organ and the piano! Please let me know if you play any kind of musical instrument. It's the gift God has given you to use for God's glory. And, there is one more for how to praise God. The psalmist calls us to praise God with dancing. African members of our church family, you are good at this, and I hope you will feel free to be yourself whenever we sing together and lead the rest of us into joyful praises of God with dancing

Finally, who is to praise God? -- everything that has breaths to take. So, with all God's people in the world and with all the living things in God's whole creation, in heaven and on earth, with all our might, let us praise God!

Truly, music is God's gift and a means to communicate God's blessings. God uses music in our worship to touch our hearts and lives in a special way.

Thanks be to God for this wonderful gift of music and for God's abundant blessings it channels to us!
Amen.