

Link Letter No.69 June 2016

Summer Greetings to you all from Taiwan!

No man is an island 'n all that!

It's kind of on the news all the time, whether related to the UK referendum on Europe, or commentary on Taiwan's new government as it tries to find its way on the international stage by not referring to itself as Taiwan or the Republic of China but as Chinese Taipei, its official name at the Olympics. It's all to do with living on an island and trying to find an identity. Who are we? And just how closely do we want to be connected to our very large and very powerful neighbours just over that stretch of water? Yep, the question is the same whether it's related to the UK and Europe, or Taiwan and Mainland China. Simon and Garfunkel sang "I am a rock. I am an island. And a rock feels no pain. And an island never cries". But here I am. On an island called Taiwan, which has indeed felt much pain, and cried plenty of tears throughout its history.

Related to that subject, I've been reading a new book, just published this year called *Green Island* by Shawna Yang Ryan, a Taiwanese-American writer in the USA. It's taking me a very long time to read it all the way through because it is moving, emotional and very thought-provoking, so it's not an easy read. But it is brilliant – beautifully written and highly recommended. It's a kind of historical novel and family saga of the whole of the second half of the 20th century in Taiwan; a fictional – but very true to life – story of a Taiwanese family from the point of view of the youngest daughter who is born on the eventful night of February 28,



Our green and pleasant land



Catherine Lee
CMS mission partner
Taiwan

Catherine Lee is a CMS mission partner in the Taiwan Episcopal Church, based at St John's University, Taipei. She serves in the church, university, chaplaincy and kindergarten ministry of the Diocese of Taiwan.

1947. That was the date of an anti-government uprising in Taiwan which was violently suppressed by the Kuomintang (KMT)-led Republic of China government and led to a massacre in which thousands were killed (estimates range from 10,000-30,000) and which marked the beginning of the Kuomintang's White Terror period in Taiwan when thousands more vanished, died or were imprisoned.

Imprisonment

And indeed, one of the themes



Taiwan in all its glory...

of the book is that of imprisonment. The title Green Island refers to a small island with the same name off Taiwan's east coast which was used as a prison and place of exile for political prisoners during the 38 years of martial law from 1949-87, and especially at the peak of the White Terror period. But it's more than that. Green Island is also a descriptive term for the whole of Taiwan – after all it was Portuguese sailors who named it “Ilha Formosa”, meaning “beautiful isle” – and in its own way was a kind of prison for everyone who lived here during the same period.

Not only was there no freedom of speech or political dissent, but even speaking the Taiwanese language at school, as many people

my age often tell me, incurred punishment from the teachers. Suspicion, lies, betrayal and survival took over everyone's lives. There were spies on every corner, and few people could be trusted to keep secrets. In the book, people are forced to make agonising decisions, facing choices of betraying either their friends or their family, of either denying their beliefs or risking the lives of their children. It was impossible to enjoy any kind of real freedom. Even when the narrator moves to join her new husband in California and they join the underground support movement for Taiwanese democracy, the same nightmares follow and try to destroy them.

For those imprisoned, it wasn't just the reality of physical imprisonment that was so degrading and humiliating, for them and their families, but even deeper than that was the imprisonment of the soul. The father of the family returns from prison on Green Island after 11 years of being presumed dead, but he returns home a broken man. Physically free, but mentally still captive. It's interesting that in the book, although not a big part of the story, the mother and the sister of the narrator come to find faith in Christ during the course of the tragic history that they live through. They find solace, faith and encouragement from being part of a church community, and a freedom in Christ to come to terms with their situation.

Freedom

But what is the meaning of freedom, and of freedom in Christ in such a context?

Occasionally I find myself doing the sermon for the English service at St James' Church, Taichung. I lived and worked there for seven years, 1999-2006, and now I continue to help them, mostly in the kindergarten through liaison with their



More views of this beautiful country

“sister school” in the USA and yes, the occasional sermon. The next sermon is in fact on this very theme, the theme of imprisonment and freedom.

The epistle that Sunday is from Galatians 3: “Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed.” The difference that faith

in Christ makes to our lives means that “there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus.” In the context of Taiwan’s tragic recent history, I guess we should add: “there is no longer Taiwanese or Chinese, KMT (Kuomintang) or DPP (Democratic Progressive Party), for we are all one in Christ Jesus.” But wounds and divisions take generations to heal, and time moves slowly.



Greenery everywhere...

Ethnicity

Ethnicity in Taiwan still largely determines political affiliation and church affiliation. Taiwan’s largest Protestant Church, the Presbyterian Church, was at the forefront of Taiwan’s democracy movement throughout the martial law period and has actively supported the DPP since its foundation in 1986. Their distinct Taiwanese identity distinguishes them from those who arrived in Taiwan after 1947, mostly the KMT and those escaping the political turmoil in China who have a much more “Chinese” identity. And it is those from Mainland China, some of whom were Anglicans (Episcopalians), who worked so hard to establish the Episcopal Church in Taiwan in the early 1950s.

These days, the Taiwan Episcopal Church is much broader, with



Such beauty...

people from all ethnic backgrounds, but because we use mostly Mandarin Chinese, the older people in our congregations are mostly those from a Chinese-speaking background. The Taiwan Presbyterian Church is broader too; in fact, in our local Presbyterian Church in Sanzhi, they also worship in Mandarin Chinese rather than Taiwanese. This is because we have a lot of indigenous Taiwan aboriginal people in our area and many of them are Presbyterian but do not speak Taiwanese. Seventy per cent of Taiwan's indigenous people (who form two per cent of the whole population in 14+ different tribes) are Christians, many nominal, and mostly either Roman Catholic or Presbyterian. There's the Hakka people too, many of whom are Presbyterian but also traditionally considered perhaps the hardest group to reach with the gospel. These days, a whole generation has now grown up bilingual in Taiwanese and Mandarin Chinese, and for younger people like our university students, Mandarin Chinese is very much their first language. Taiwan is changing, the church is changing, and as from May 20, 2016, we have a new government, a new president and a new future lies ahead.

A wedding

A few weeks ago, one of the St James' Church kindergarten teachers was married in Taipei and I was asked by the kindergarten to represent them and to say some words on their behalf. The wedding was held in a branch of the Church in Taipei, affiliated to the Local Churches Movement or The Little Flock, which was started in the 1930s in Mainland China by Watchman Nee, and in Taiwan from 1949 onwards by Witness Lee. Interestingly Watchman Nee started his education in a CMS school in China, and was quite influenced by CMS people throughout his life. The church is very much associated with those who came from Mainland China after 1949, and it too has become broader in recent years, working with other Christian groups and churches in sharing the gospel.

At the wedding, the word I used for "God" in my speech is not one that is used by that particular church. Yes, even the words used for "God" by different church denominations are different. Some of the difference is because of translation, and it is not restricted to Taiwan. I remember the same problems in Tanzania. I guess that the world over, we still have some way to go before we can truly say "there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female (or whatever is the local equivalent for our situation), for we are all one in Christ Jesus".

And so back to "no man is an island", that oh so famous line written in 1624 by the poet John Donne, which was also taken as the title of Thomas Merton's book of meditations, first published in 1955; the first chapter is "Love Can Be Kept Only by Being Given Away". Maybe that's the secret after all. Love can be kept only by being given away. Ah, yes, maybe even Simon and Garfunkel would agree with that. But that's a whole other story, a whole other link letter, for a whole other time!

Thank you for all your prayers and support,
Love to you all,

Catherine

www.cms-uk.org



Church Mission Society

Watlington Road, Oxford, OX4 6BZ Tel: 01865 787400 Fax: 01865 776375
Email: info@cms-uk.org www.cms-uk.org Registered Charity Number 1131655