

Catherine Lee

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The call in action

The Soul Trembles...

This is us, facing a new situation in Taiwan, our collective soul trembling as a COVID-19 surge in Greater Taipei has suddenly wrenched us from our complacency that all was well. These last few days have seen the biggest community transmission numbers so far, and suddenly we find ourselves facing the reality that all of you elsewhere in the world have been dealing with for over a year.

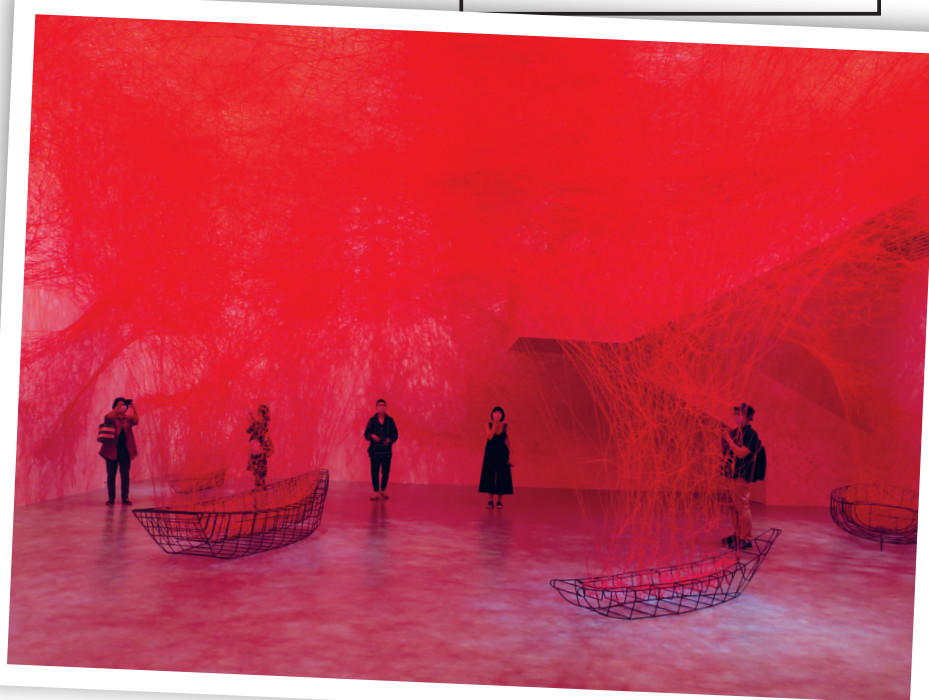
Our little COVID-secure bubble of 23 million people has finally burst, the virus finding a way in through our Achilles heel, namely airline pilots and crew, who were required to do just five days' quarantine, rather than 14 days like all other arrivals. Living in our little bubble for so long has led to a false sense of security, so even those eligible for vaccines didn't take up the offer, and the expiry date loomed. Now the rush is on; let's hope many more of the 20 million doses ordered from overseas will be delivered soon. Meanwhile, phase two trials of locally developed vaccines are nearly complete and the vaccines should be available in July. Until then, vulnerable is the word. It's no wonder Taiwan's soul is trembling.

The Soul Trembles is also the name of a new exhibition at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, officially running from 1 May until 29 August. Well, it would be running if it was open, but only two weeks after opening, it had to be closed, along with all other public buildings, under Taipei's new restrictions.

The exhibition is by a Japanese installation artist called Shiota Chiharu (塩田 千春), based in Berlin. The title *The Soul Trembles* means "the emotional stirrings of the heart that cannot be put into words". She says, "In today's contemporary age, everything changes at a rapid pace, and value systems are in constant flux: it can seem as if the firm and unyielding beliefs that society as a whole has relied upon are themselves being lost". Seems fitting for Taiwan's current situation. She specialises in using thread, representing links and connections, which she weaves all around the room in a huge web-like canopy. Her most amazing installation is called *Uncertain Journey*, a vast net of bright red woven threads coming from black metal frames of boats. Truly stunning.



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My call: To serve, share, and support the ministry of the Church in Taiwan.
My role: Working with the Taiwan Episcopal Church, based at St John's University, Taipei, I support the church, chaplaincy and kindergarten ministry of the Diocese of Taiwan.



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Uncertain Journey

Life is indeed one long uncertain journey. On Good Friday, we had a major rail disaster on Taiwan's east coast with 49 people killed, over 200 injured. Taiwan's centre and south are facing their worst drought in over 50 years, with big water and power cuts, threatening crops and Taiwan's vitally-important semiconductor industry, the world's largest.

Internationally, we are all concerned about rising Asian hate in the USA, UK and Europe. Seemingly contradictory headlines such as the 2020 global crime report that named Taiwan as the world's second-safest country contrast greatly with The Economist's front cover for 1 May 2021, which declared Taiwan to be "The most dangerous place on Earth" (listed under "Superpower politics", subtitled "America and China must work harder to avoid war over the future of Taiwan"). More soul-trembling food for thought.

Given all this, it's really quite remarkable that Taiwan's people are so calm and upbeat. And ready. Within a week, since seven cases of community transmission were announced last Monday, rising to 29 on Friday, then suddenly to 180 on Saturday, everyone has retreated inside their homes, while all schools and religious groups have moved their activities online. For our churches, we remain grateful that we have got this far through the pandemic and only now have to cancel our Sunday services. I happen to be writing this in the 10-day period between Ascension Day and Pentecost, which in itself is a time of transition in the church calendar, reflecting the timing of events after the resurrection. It makes me realise how the disciples themselves had plenty of soul-trembling experiences on their own uncertain journeys of faith.

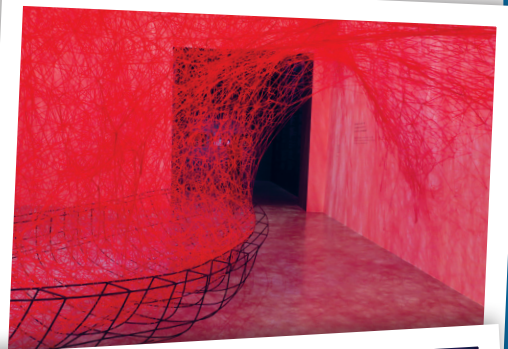
As I write this too, I realise that my own uncertain journey of faith started 60 years ago today, 20 May, 1961, when I was baptised, all of six weeks old. In gratitude to God, family and friends!

Taiwan schools were still open last Friday and I spent the day at our local elementary school. We played the game Twister, where you put your hands and feet on different colours on the mat without getting all twisted up and falling over. I played too, it was such fun! One thing the children quickly learned was that if everyone on the mat is facing the same direction, it is so much easier, the game lasts longer and it's more enjoyable. Working together, making way for others, and keeping yourself balanced are key. It works in life too.

Even if we don't know how this current COVID surge is going to develop, and even if Christians in Taiwan cannot gather in person to worship this coming Pentecost Sunday or for the foreseeable future, still we can look forward to a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit as we step out once again in faith to continue our spiritual journey. We are sent out into the world to share the good news with our family, friends, neighbours, colleagues and those we meet on the way, and even if we cannot go physically, we are still called to action, which includes praying for each other. As we have prayed for you throughout this pandemic, so we also ask for your prayers for us all in Taiwan at this time.

Thank you, and may God go with us and be with us every step of the way.

Catherine



Photos from top to bottom: Uncertain Journey; baptism, 20 May 1961; Twister

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