

World Communion Sunday

October 6, 2019

2 Timothy 1:1-14 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Salutation

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,

2 To Timothy, my beloved child:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

Thanksgiving and Encouragement

3 I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. 4 Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. 5 I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. 6 For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; 7 for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

8 Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, 9 who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, 10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. 11 For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher,[a] 12 and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him.[b] 13 Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 14 Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

A reflection from John McCall, mission co-worker serving in Taiwan

A number of years ago, I was teaching at the Aboriginal Seminary on Taiwan's East Coast, and a staff member told me that an incoming student had the same Mandarin name as me. When I came to Taiwan, I was given a Mandarin name (Ma Yueh-Han / 馬約翰). Almost no one in Taiwan uses or even knows my English name. I am always referred to by my Mandarin name. Up to that point, I had never heard anyone else with my name. So, I called this incoming student from the Bunun tribe and asked his son if he was there. He didn't happen to be at home, but I met him on the first day of class. I told him that since we had the same name, if I

were ever sick, he could preach for me. He replied, “No, if I am ever sick, you can take the test for me.”

Ma Yueh-Han (馬約翰) felt called to be a pastor from a young age. But his father wanted him to find a job that paid better. So he became a police officer. One day he was apprehending a criminal, who shot him twice. One bullet entered his abdomen, and from then on, he has had to use a wheelchair for mobility.

He retired from the police force when he was fifty and entered the seminary. Two years later, his wife, Ali, also began her studies at the seminary. Yueh-Han and Ali had three children, a son and later twin daughters. The son had his time in the far country straying from God’s way but returned to God and to the church and later began his undergraduate studies at the seminary. The son and his wife also had three children of their own.

Tragically, one evening, their son was riding in a car driven by a classmate, and the car went too fast around a curve and crashed. Both young men were killed. You can imagine the deep sorrow that Ali and Yueh-Han felt, for they had seen such a positive change in their son. Facing the tragic loss of a child is probably one of the greatest challenges to one’s faith. They also grieved for their three grandchildren who would now grow up without a father.

Yueh-Han and Ali continued their studies at the seminary, and both graduated. For the last four years, they have been serving a tribal church in South Mountain, a village on Taiwan’s East Coast nestled in beautiful mountains above the Pacific Ocean. The church had been without a pastor for a while, and many of the young adults, youth, and children had drifted away from the church.

This past weekend, I was invited to speak at a joint church youth event on Saturday evening and preach at a joint church renewal service on Sunday. I took the tilting train (which tilts on the curves so it can keep up a fast speed) from Taipei to Yuli, a small town on the East Coast. I was greeted at the train station by Yueh-Han, Ali, their daughter, and their three grandchildren. We stopped to get fresh mango smoothies at a local shop and then headed through the mountains to the Pacific coast. It took us about an hour and a half to arrive at their village. When we arrived, we drank tea, and slowly youth from neighboring villages arrived for the youth event. Many of these youth are going to school in Taiwan’s cities and come back to their villages for the weekend. Several of my former seminary students, who are serving churches in the area, brought the youth from their churches. It is always a joy to listen to former students and see how God is at work in and through them.

I am always grateful for the opportunity to be with youth and to encourage them to live into their identities as God’s daughters and sons. The aboriginal youth love to sing, and it is always an uplifting time to see them return to their roots in the villages and be with other aboriginal young people who understand them.

As I had the opportunity to hear from Yueh-Han and Ali about their lives and ministry, I was struck by all that they have had to endure, and yet they are pastors of hope and faith. Yueh-Han expresses no rancor toward the man who shot him and confined him to a wheelchair. He and Ali have joined with their daughter-in-law to share their faith with their three grandchildren. They deeply miss their son, but they trust that he is in heaven and one day they shall meet again.

So often I am invited to aboriginal churches to share the Good News of the Gospel, but as I watch and listen to my aboriginal brothers and sisters, they share the Good News with me by the power of the witness of their lives.

Sunday morning before I stood to preach, the entire congregation stood to sing a song of praise in the unique eight-part harmony of the Bunun tribe. As I looked out at their faces, I felt as if I were in heaven. Their lives are hard, but their faith is strong. And this couple is working hard to invite the children and youth of the village back to the community of faith. One young man was a gifted baseball player and was moving up the ranks when a serious injury prevented him from reaching his dream. He is now the youth group leader. Another youth shared with me how his dad used to be controlled by alcohol but has stopped drinking and returned to church. I met a fifth grader who last year was diagnosed with bone cancer. He had surgery to remove the bone below his knee. He used to love to play basketball but now walks with a significant limp. He has had ten chemo treatments and still has four to go. But his eyes shone with light. Yueh-Han invites the men of the village to join him to drink tea each Saturday night at 7:30. Some of these men do not attend worship, but Yueh-Han is seeking to build bridges with them and slowly invite them back to church.

As I took the crowded train back to Taipei, I gave thanks for this couple who have not allowed the significant tragedies of their lives to prevent them from being a blessing to others. Their hearts are not bitter. They are honest about their grief. And perhaps their hard experiences allow them to understand the challenges that others are facing. They certainly are an encouragement to me.

In small and often unnoticed places, God is at work. And God is at work in the village of South Mountain through Ali and Yueh-Han. Children and youth of that village know that they are loved by God and by the community of faith. There is hope in the air!

Thank you for your interest, concern, and generosity that allow me to journey with folks like Ali and Yueh-Han.

Gratefully,
John McCall (馬約翱)

To learn more about John's ministry, visit
presbyterianmission.org/ministries/missionconnections/john-mccall.