Summer greetings to you all from a very hot and humid Taiwan!

“Every island to a child is a treasure island.” So said England’s grande dame of mystery and queen of crime, P. D. James. She’s right about islands. She’s right about children also. Just a shame that most of us grow up to lose that sense of wonder, curiosity and fascination with islands, and mostly with everything else too. My love of islands and island ecology started much later, when I visited Fair Isle at 17, and then Shetland, Orkney and the Faroes. Many are windswept, rugged, bleak and remote – and getting there is an adventure in itself (don’t ask me about the Fair Isle ferry!), but all are beautiful in their own way, especially when the sun comes out. Treasure islands, all.

Of course, the UK is an island country and so is Taiwan. There’s many similarities in all island nations, including a rugged determination and self-sufficient spirit of resilience that has sustained us for centuries, and even more so in the face of hostile attacks, whether from invading forces or natural disasters.

And just as the UK has many smaller offshore islands to explore, so too has Taiwan, and I’ve had the opportunity to visit two of Taiwan’s offshore islands in the past few months. Over Tomb-Sweeping Festival in early April, I went with some friends to visit Lanyu Orchid Island, 60 km east of Taiwan’s southern tip. It’s way out in the rough and choppy Pacific Ocean – don’t ask about the Lanyu ferry, but it’s the main reason why more people don’t go! Lanyu is remote, mountainous, often inaccessible and frequently almost blown off the face of the earth by passing typhoons.

During the Japanese colonial era, 1895–1945, for ethnological research purposes, Lanyu was closed to all visitors, thus allowing the local people from the Yami/Tao tribe to keep their culture and customs; theirs are the most well-preserved of all Taiwan’s indigenous people. Interestingly they are not related to Taiwan’s indigenous people.

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Name: Catherine Lee
Location: Taiwan
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 am supporting the church, chaplaincy and kindergarten ministry of the Diocese of Taiwan.
but instead to the peoples of the Batan Archipelago in the far north of the Philippines and their two languages and cultures have much in common. These days they are nearly all Christians; there are churches and prayer stations everywhere and we did not spot a single temple the whole time we were there.

Then a few weeks ago, a group of us from the Taiwan Episcopal Church went to Lyudao Green Island, 33km off the east coast of Taiwan and much further north than Lanyu. Lyudao no longer has any indigenous culture, other than the remains of some A-mei tribal homes; there’s also plenty of temples and very few Christians. Both islands are famous for their diving and snorkeling just offshore, with hundreds swimming out daily to see the coral reefs and tropical fish. Really stunning – so many amazing colours!

Taiwan’s islands to the west, notably Penghu, Matsu and Kinmen, are also fascinating, but due to their location in the Taiwan Strait between Taiwan and mainland China, they are also very strategic in military defence which means that there are army bases all over. Taiwan’s islands to the east, Lanyu and Lyudao, have not suffered in the same way militarily but their history is possibly even more tragic. From 1947 onwards, both were used as a “dumping ground” by the Chinese Nationalist government, Lyudao used for political prisoners during the White Terror Era and martial law period (1949–87), and Lanyu used for nuclear waste storage, starting in 1982, under the guise of being a fish cannery.

Since my visits to Lanyu and Lyudao, I’ve been thinking about islands and island mentality. It’s been mentioned a lot in connection with Brexit and the current international situation. How does it apply to me, to us, to Taiwan and to the UK? How does it affect our faith (or vice versa), and our attitudes to our neighbours – and neighbouring countries? I’m beginning to start preparing for my home leave, coming this summer, and that’s the theme for my PowerPoint presentation to be available for use on my visits to CMS link churches and meetings.

My home leave is officially mid-August to mid-February; I’m planning to arrive in the UK on August 20, leaving to return to Taiwan on February 6, 2019.

I am hoping to see you all at one of my CMS link church visits – they’re already booked! Mostly a weekend each, as follows:

- Sunday September 23: South Hartismere Benefice (Thornham Magna and Mellis), Suffolk
- Sunday September 30: St. Andrew’s, Spennymoor, Co. Durham
- Sunday October 7: St Helen’s, Sandal Magna, Wakefield, W. Yorks
- Sunday October 14: St Michael’s, Beccles, Suffolk
- Sunday October 28: St Thomas, Batley, and Dewsbury Minster, W. Yorks
- Sunday November 4: St John’s, Neville’s Cross, Durham
- Sunday November 18: All Saints, Luton, Beds
- Sunday November 25: St. Michael’s, Heighington, Co. Durham (inc. St Matthew’s and St Luke’s, Darlington)
- Sunday December 9: St Andrew’s, Haughton, Darlington, Co. Durham (inc. Sadberge)
- Sunday January 6: St Andrew’s, Sedbergh, Cumbria
- Sunday January 13: All Saints, Hurworth, Darlington, Co. Durham

So dearest friends and relatives, if can spot any gaps in my itinerary and want to invite me to come and visit, or meet up somewhere, do let me know!

Before then, of course, there’s much to do and prepare. As we come to the end of the school year, so my classes are coming to an end: three community English classes for adults, student Bible study and conversation classes at St John’s University, and junior high school English classes locally. My
monthly English sermons at St James’ Church, Taichung, continue with added one-offs in two of our Taipei churches which have English services, including a newly-started English service in the cathedral.

And then there’s the diocesan “Friendship Magazine” to put together, emails to write on behalf of the bishop and diocesan office, plus visitors coming and going. And finally two weeks in August of teaching children through Good Shepherd Church Bible classes in Taipei. And hopefully a few mountains to climb, trips to take, visitors to welcome, photos to process, and services and church events to take part in.

My challenge in preparing that PowerPoint for my link visits is what to include and what to leave out. Where is God at work in my life and in the ministry here in Taiwan? Where is our outreach most effective? Who are the people who are responding to the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives? Still working on the answers!

It’s June, and here in northern Taiwan, it’s the lotus flowering season. There are at least 15 fields full of flowering lotus plants in the local area. Only a few months ago, those fields were just mud. Waterlogged muddy fields with a few dead lotus leaves, left from last year. Now they are filled with huge green leaves and beautiful pink lotus flowers. In the sunshine, they are exquisite. But they are notoriously difficult to photograph due to all that horrible mud. Taiwan is a land of Buddhist temples, and the lotus is a symbol of Buddhism, of purity and detachment, of beauty and enlightenment.

It’s a lesson for us too. That such a stunningly beautiful flower can emerge from such stinking, horrible and treacherous mud is one of nature’s miracles of transformation.

Through Christ, we too can know such transformation in our own lives and in our communities. Yes, transformation, even of our “island mentalities”, both individually and communally, that often prevent us from welcoming others to our shores and into our lives. We pray that from the mud of our own lives, we too can produce flowers and fruits in such abundance and such beauty, that people’s attention is drawn away from us towards God, giving glory to him.

I am looking forward to seeing you all in the UK at one of my link church visits or in-between times. Thank you again for all your love and support – see y’all soon!

Please note my new blog address is: https://catherinelee234.com

With love and best wishes,

Catherine

**PLEASE PRAY FOR...**

- **My home leave in the UK**, link church visits, visits to friends and family, holidays and meetings, for safety and good health.
- **The Taiwan Episcopal Church and St John’s University (SJU), Taiwan**, for Bishop David J. H. Lai who was recently elected as chair of the SJU board of trustees, and for preparations for the election of his successor as bishop when he reaches the mandatory retirement age of 72 in March 2020.
- **Taiwan and the UK as island nations**, that our “island mentalities” will be transformed, giving glory to God.
- **The Christian communities in Lanyu and Lyudao and all Taiwan’s offshore islands**, for their witness, their welcome and their identity as Christians. In the summer months, tourists almost overrun the islands, and maintaining regular church worship for local people is a challenge. Plus, the typhoon season is starting so please pray for God’s protection and mercy.

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Above: An old house on Lyudao