

The Cullers Family

2nd Generation Missionaries

Taiwan



07-08/23 Prayer Letter Update

Hope all is well with you dear praying friends and family! It has been a busy few months, as I'm sure it has been for you as well. I wanted to start out with a report about the tribal camp I was able to take part in. What I previously was unaware of was how official the camp actually turned out to be. Apparently, it was a Taiwan Government Ministry of Education program to groom the next generation of leaders in villages and tribes across the island, with the intent of bridging tribal ways and needs with Government rule and sphere of influence. There were only a couple foreigners including myself that were brought in to be an English practice resource for the high schoolers. There were even a few kids from our neck of the woods! These kids are top of their class and are likely to end up as foreign exchange students elsewhere. Their English was quite good.

I'm not sure how many videos and pages of notes I took since the information was free-flowing and in-depth. I learned a lot about the tribal people in general, as well as more about the Tsou tribe. We took a day trip to a Tsou village up in the Alishan mountains and were shown how the locals fish and trap game, as well as learned about traditional tabboos and religious beliefs. We even built traps for pheasants and for fish made out of local vegetation. Who knew a banana tree trunk had so many uses? Since the group was entirely tribal, what was shared was not the polished tourist-friendly type of content. There were times myself and the handful of other foreigners were asked to leave the group and go partake in the more touristy stuff. "Oh, the village has prepared a show for you about the songs and dance of the tribe (what an honor)!" Translation: go be distracted over here while we talk brass tacs and bring in the shaman/witchdoctor for some very closely guarded secret rituals. So, while we got the classic tourist show about the "savage's way of life," (who writes these titles anyways?) down by the river something very dark and soul-barringly authentic was happening. That's where I wish I could be. I want to see the real, raw, not-best-foot-forward realities of their beliefs. How can we successfully introduce them to Christ if we aren't even willing to wrestle through their long-held beliefs and traditions in our own minds? Anyway, since I am almost to page two, I will wrap this up and briefly give an update about everything else that has happened in the past few months.

The Neipu church work is going well. I find the majority of my work and preaching there is geared toward discipleship and teaching. The Hakka are another close-knit and difficult group of people to see fruit in. Not only is it very hard to see a convert, but the very few Christians there are have such a need for training and encouragement to revamp their efforts to reach their own families and communities. All across the world, we human beings just seem to like doing the same thing over and over again because it's what's been passed down. Sometimes, I wish more people questioned things and think bigger-picture. But, the work is growing! There have been actually quite a few new people and families that have started coming. It is now pretty regular to see first-time visitors attend. A wonderful percentage of them even continue coming back!

*"Crowded modern cities, or in the mountains wild,
Every soul is just as precious in Your sight.
Anywhere You send, I am prepared to go.
Lord, oh help me love the ones You love!"*

Victory Baptist Church

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Speaking of visitors, we have had a recent flood of Paiwan tribal contacts! Isn't it just like God to just bring people to you sometimes? We have had a new Paiwan family start attending the AM and kids Saturday Bible Club. Another couple have opened a shop a few doors down from the church, and we were able to visit their family home in the mountains with my parents and eat a meal her mother prepared. I love tribal food! It is a completely different cuisine compared to East Asian cultures. I have said many times before, Taiwan is surprisingly culturally and linguistically diverse and complex. I will say too, it felt so good to have been able to explain some of the food and significance because of our own previous experiences. I watched the host's face light up when I was able to recall the names of some of the dishes in Paiwan!

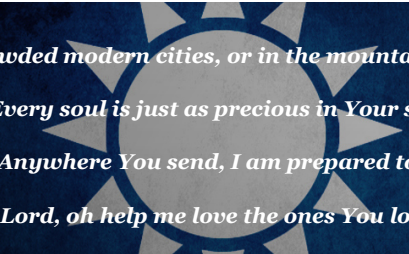
This family is part of the noble class in the village, which means they are "royalty" and are part of the class charged with preserving and protecting the tribal way of life. This includes the old stories, traditions, and policies the village abides by today. They are the contact point between the tribe and the outside world. The lady spoke of Spanish Catholic missionaries who came hundreds of years ago and that is why the village is "Catholic" today. She was impressed by them because they learned and spoke Paiwan. It is amazing how the simple (but herculean in personal effort) act of learning someone's language and customs yields an opportunity. People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care, right? We may not be fans of Catholicism, but I'll give them this - they did it right and learned Paiwan, and it yielded results for them. I put quotations around Catholic because of the severe syncretism that occurs in Tribal villages. Swap Catholic for any other denomination and you still have the same issue. There is a very loose blending of aspects of Christianity with the animism of the traditional beliefs.

This was highlighted by her explanation of how she sought healing for her injured arm. Traditionally, physical ailments/problems are a result of imbalance in the spiritual realm of spirits. So, having an injured arm, she wrote down a verse of Scripture by hand, and performed some sort of ritual (maybe binding to the arm?) to bring healing to the sore arm. Remember, they prefer oral stories to written, so the using of Holy Writ would be thought to have a magical power over the physical. Think a witch pulling out a spell on paper in another language and expecting the incantation to harness the power of the spiritual to affect change in the physical. Instead of having a relationship with the Father and simply asking Him for healing, a process which entirely happens between our spirit and His, they would resort to magic and shamanism to entreat or bind the spirits including God's to do their bidding.

I could go on, much has happened, but I will wrap up here and simply say, things have been going well! Oh and also, we are moving right now, our 6th home in 4 years, so if you would pray for a smooth move as we get things set up in a new area, we would appreciate it! God bless.

Expecting Great Things,

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