

World Day of Prayer 2023 from Taiwan

"I have heard about your faith"

Hannover International Worship

February 19, 2023

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Women from Taiwan have prepared this year's World Day of Prayer. They focussed on a word from the letter to the Ephesians:

Ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

"I have heard about your faith"... I must say that this sentence intrigued me. The first time I read it I wondered: When did I last say this about someone? When did I last thank God for somebody's faith, instead of finding fault with it, criticizing it for being too much or too little, overly eager or not eager enough, too agnostic or too fundamentalist... I can always think of something when it comes to that.

But "I have heard about your faith"... When did I last say that about someone, or say it to someone? Must be a long time ago. If ever.

I wonder how you feel about this. When did you last say this about someone? Or did you ever? Why don't you just look right and left, or turn your head a little, look at the people around you: Did you ever say that about one of the persons sitting near you? Could you?

Let me try and draw a picture of how this letter came about.

The author of this sentence has been all over the place around the Mediterranean. He knows some congregations personally, some he has only heard about. Once in a while he receives news from one of these congregations. Sometimes it is a letter, sometimes a messenger who will come and visit him.

These news can be of a very different nature. One congregation may be going through tough times, facing poverty, or persecution. Another congregation may be going through internal struggles, members being hopelessly divided about the true belief, or some members even leaving the congregation.

From the region of Asia Minor – that is today's Turkey – it's good news that reach the apostle. A messenger has brought him these news and told him what is going on in these congregations. People are holding on to their faith in Jesus Christ as they have been taught. And not only that: Their faith is not just empty words. They are full of love to others, and that shows in their deeds.

You are probably familiar with the old saying among journalists: "Only bad news is good news", but that is not the case here. These are truly good news from the congregations in Asia Minor. And so the apostle sits down and starts writing a letter. Full of joy and gratefulness, he writes:

I have heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people.

Possibly some of you are familiar with the concept of World Day of Prayer. Every year, women from a different country of the world prepare the service. Sometimes these are nearby countries, like last year's England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Sometimes they are far away, like Vanuatu the year before, or Taiwan this year. We can take the sentence from Ephesians quite literally: "I have heard about your faith!"

Every year, we hear about the faith of women from one particular country, from Vanuatu, from England, from Taiwan, and how these women put their faith into actions of love. We will now hear about women from Taiwan.

Let us hear about Pao-Chu.

[Woman 1: Pao-Chu]

We have heard about the faith of Pao-Chu and her loving care for God's good creation. Let us give thanks for her, praying that our God may give her, and us, the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. Let her be an inspiration for us to find ways to protect and care for God's creation and the world we live in.

Let us hear about Feng-Jiao.

[Woman 2: Feng-Jiao]

We have heard about the faith of Feng-Jiao and her trust in God's guidance as she faced the challenges of discrimination at work and of balancing caring for her family and the need to work for extra income. Let us give thanks for her, and for the example she sets of how we can turn to God in times of challenge when life is difficult.

Let us hear about Jojo.

[Woman 3: Jojo]

We have heard about the faith of Jojo and her prayer for guidance to withstand pressure, at home and at work. Let us give thanks for her, and, like her, realize that God created us in his own image and blessed us, no matter if we are men or women, boys or girls, or whatever. May the Holy Spirit show us when we must speak up for justice for ourselves and others.

Let us hear about Pearl.

[Woman 4: Pearl]

We have heard about the faith of Pearl and her courageous service. Let us give thanks for all those who take care of the sick and the dying, and let us include in our prayers those the women from Taiwan could not know about when they prepared this service a year ago, the helpers in the terrible earthquake in Turkey and Syria that work hard to still rescue people when it has become almost hopeless, those who take care of the sad but necessary task of recovering the dead, and those who comfort and support the survivors.

Let us hear about Daiken.

[Woman 5: Daiken]

We have heard about the faith of Daiken which gave her the strength to use her painful story to help and encourage others. Let us give thanks for her, praying for the Holy Spirit to give us wisdom so that we can support and encourage those carrying the scars of suffering.

We can give thanks for the faith of the Christian women in Taiwan, a faith not only in words but in deeds.

We can start noticing the faith in words and deeds that may be just around us and go unnoticed. We can thank God for other people's faith.

And we can let our own faith work in word and deed, full of love toward all God's saints – which is: all of us, everyone who belongs to him.

I have heard about your faith:

Now I wonder: When did someone last say that about us?

Let's give them a reason to say it.

Amen.