

Anglican Church of Freiburg
Sunday before Lent
February 27, 2022
Homily
Theme: The Joy of Praying
Text: Luke 9:28-36

The Transfiguration

²⁸ Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹ And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³⁰ Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. ³¹ They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³² Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake,^[b] they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³ Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings,^[c] one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said. ³⁴ While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” ³⁶ When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

We meet today in the context of a war.
We remembered Ukraine
All who live in fear
All who panic around the blasts
All who are fleeing and All who are resiliently staying back
All who bear the brunt of hard weather
All who are hungry and thirsty
All who await evacuation
All who live in tears
All who are losing their children never to get them back
All who are losing their spouses for no fault of theirs
All who are losing their parents with whom they should have lived many more years.

All who are losing neighbours and friends
All who are leaving behind all their life time earnings
All who are dying so much ahead of their times
We remember the impact that is happening on economy and environment
We remember all the humanitarian interventions happening
We remember each of us who are being impacted in different ways
We come together today in the context of a human created and easily avoidable WAR

In a couple of days we will be celebrating Ash Wednesday. We enter into period of solemnity, prayer, repentance and transformation meditating on the Lord Jesus Christ, his passion, the cross and the resurrection. We are in the cusp phase between the Carnivals and the Lenten season, albeit sobered now by the pandemic and the war. It is therefore worth taking a look at the Transfiguration experience of Jesus that Peter, John and James were witnesses.

For several people Christ is just an ordinary experience that does not appeal to them at all. But for some others Christ has an extra ordinary appeal. They are passionate about Christ, about worship, about prayer and about the adventures of the faith journey. They are happy to reach out to people in prayer and has a heart for the other. It is all about those moments wherein they realised the difference- between the ordinary and the extraordinary.

First, this text and our context today calls us to reflect on our Prayer Lives

The Mountain top experience of PRAYER. Let us first look at our prayer lives. Our personal prayers. Our family prayers. Our corporate prayers. Jesus took with him three of his disciples and went up on the mountain to pray. What is prayer.

Ukraine for instance in burning. People are in deep anguish. For the people who live under the threat of their life, for the people who leave everything behind and are fleeing not knowing where they are headed to, for the people reconciling with death of dear ones, permanent irrecoverable damages of war- what is prayer.

If you had known of bullock carts there is a story told of three people in bullock carts. On the way blocking the road was a huge stone. The first one

sat back and started cursing God and others. The second one sat back and started praying fervently and the third one went up to the heavy stone and started pushing the same off the road praying- God give me strength to take this off the way. Soon a couple others joined and the stone was off. The question remains. What is prayer.

Charles Spurgeon once said- true prayer is neither a mere mental exercise nor a vocal performance. It is far deeper than that- it is a spiritual transaction with the Creator of Heaven and Earth. When we equip ministers we are often told 'Prayer is the first thing, the second thing and the most important thing needed to be a minister'. It was Corrie Ted Boom who said- I am who I am because prayer is my steering wheel not the spare tyre.

What is happening to our prayer lives today. May I draw your attention to the Pandemonium scene of Milton's Paradise Lost. The context of the story is this

High on a Throne of Royal State, which far
Outshon the wealth of *Ormus* and of *Ind*,
Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand
Shows on her Kings *Barbaric* Pearl and Gold,
Satan exalted sat, by merit rais'd
To that bad eminence;

To claim our just inheritance of old,
Surer to prosper than prosperity
Could have assur'd us; and by what best way,
Whether of open Warr or covert guile,
We now debate; who can advise, may speak.

The conversation that ensued had all the members of the Council including Belial, Moloch and Beelzebub making their point and finally they decided the best way to pain the heart of God is to draw the human away from God. No better way to pain God. Satan rejoiced and stood. The plot of Genesis 3 unfolds with the serpent and the fruit.

Now it was today in Freiburg Germany, the same Council meeting. They would be happy that several people do not take God seriously but how do we handle the ones who are still interested in God and prayer. The answer is simple. Blot their egos and make them feel they are super busy. They will have no time for prayer. Are we too busy to pray.

For Jesus prayer was a habit- a part of his life. It was there he went to when struggles came- to gain strength to face them. Here again in the shadow of the cross he runs to pray.

Look at Ukraine again. Long queues in front of fuel stations. Before the flight they want to ensure they have fuel for the hard days. Prayer is the fuel for strength in tough times.

It is all about a relationship. Little Johnny used to hop into church every morning on his way to school kneel and pray- O Jesus- this is little Johnny keep the world safe. One day Johnny fell ill. He could not go to school and so could not go to church. But exactly at the same time he used to be at church he was astonished to see Jesus walking by. He said Hi Little Johnny I am Jesus. Just came to check out on you. Get well soon. Prayer is a relationship.

Secondly Prayer transforms the ordinary into the realms of the extraordinary.

Here on the top of the mountain watch the scene again 'And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.'

The extra-ordinary experience had a physical realm to it but more than that some deep spiritual implications. I would want to pick three experiences people have culled out from this passage. One is the dazzling of the garments. The revelation of the glory of God. What seems to be very ordinary for the majority could be an extra ordinary experience for a few people and that is beauty of prayer. That is the beauty of worship. The Lord's table is a ritual for some and for some others it is a very deeply significant spiritual experience. The fulcrum of our faith.

The prayer that we prayed as children as we went to church each time was this

Open Our Eyes Lord- We want to see Jesus

Open Our Ears Lord- We want to hear Jesus

Open Our Hearts Lord- We want to experience Jesus

The second is the conversation with Elijah and Moses. Moses was destined to lead the people out of slavery into the promised land. He did have a glimpse of the promised land but was not able to cross the Jordan. People thought it was unfair but here take a close look Moses is in the promised

territory years after his time. Elijah was taken up into glory and here is Elijah again.

The continuing presence of Elijah and Moses in our midst is what we sang today as the Gradual Hymn

These are the days of Elijah

Declaring the word of the Lord

And these are the days of Your servant Moses

Righteousness being restored

And though these are days of great trial

Of famine and darkness and sword

Still, we are the voice in the desert crying

"Prepare ye the way of the Lord!"

Behold, He comes riding on the clouds

Shining like the sun at the trumpet call

Lift your voice, the year of jubilee

And out of Zion's hill, salvation comes

And third note the subject of their conversation. The word used here is departure. And that gives a very significant meaning for death and dying. Preparing for the cross the conversation that helps Jesus face the passion that is on the horizon is the whole idea of departure from the here into the here-after.

The ministry of the church is surely to help people live with dignity. We should also understand that our ministry also include helping people die with dignity and hope. Healing is a miracle but death could be a much deeper miracle.

In the context of unwarranted death, dying and brutal killing as people grope in darkness for hope at the loss- a prayer as a family reached safety leaving the dad behind is significant. Lord keep him safe- and we will surely meet here or in the hereafter.

Thirdly, Prayer is transcending the selfishness of spirituality.

We cannot overlook the desire of Peter to dwell High Up on the Hills. He tells Jesus as he gazes on that marvellous sight - We shall make three tents. One for you, one for Moses and One for Elijah. And we better stay here. This is the mountain top. This is the Cloud 9.

The desire to keep the experience of Glory in exclusive tents- The “We are OK Here” Mindset. It is that mindset that leads to spiritual exclusivism. The attempt to keep Christ within the tents that we set up has ever since continued.

Exclusivism goes to the extent of saying- Christ is only here and not anywhere else.

As important as the Mountain Top experience was for Jesus the people waiting for healing down the Valley. The mountain top was to gain strength for the ministry down the Valley and the mission far beyond- even up to Golgotha, Calvary, Resurrection and Ascension and the promise of coming again.

Rather than making tents for Christ the challenge is to travel along with Christ wherever Christ leads us by hand.

The Choice is to hold on to Christ or to “let Christ go” down into the Valleys where people wait for the healing touch of the Lord.

The Church is called to ensure a mountain top experience of Christ and to be humble enough to let Christ go to where Christ is needed most and wherever possible accompany him. Follow him.

Instead of saying- Help us Have Our Way we should be able to pray

Have Thine own way Lord

Have Thine own way

Thou art the potter I am the clay

Mold me and make me after Thy will

While I am waiting yielded and still

Finally, Prayer is all about Listening to the Voice of God.

As the conversation was happening a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”

Prayer is the recognition of the presence of the Son of God in our midst. Prayer is the understanding of the mystery of Divine Choice. Prayer is the call to Listen to Christ. Prayer is never a monologue. It is always a conversation. We would have heard the short story titled- The Chair. The elderly person was seriously ill and the priest was called for the final unction. There was a chair by the person and he said- Cant you see someone sitting there. The priest could not and the man said- well I can see Christ.

When I was young I was never interested in God and the Church. When I became a professional I had no time. Marriage, family, children, job- life

went on. The children grew and flew away from the nest. And it all changed when my partner too flew away and I became sick. I began to talk to Christ and then gradually realised Christ responds. It developed into a deep friendship of conversation and now I enjoy the conversations with my dear Lord. The priest as he did the unction prayer- God give me this faith. Next morning the priest had a call. Dad passed away peacefully but strangely he was leaning on the chair and he passed on. The priest immediately understood the man was resting in the bosom of Christ as he passed on. That is listening to Christ intimately.

As we enter into the phase of Lent, even as we see horrific images from Ukraine and of our brothers and sisters worshipping in subways, in roadsides, in bunkers and in make shift places of refuge this morning- let us pray- Lord teach us to pray.....

The war will end. The leaders will shake hands. The old woman will keep waiting for her martyred son. That girl will wait for her beloved husband. And those children will wait for their heroic father. I don't know who sold our homeland. But I saw who paid the price. ~Mahmoud Darwish

Much deeper price was paid on the cross and May our Lent experience be a meaningful one this time.

Vinod Victor
February 27, 2022