

Anglican Church of Freiburg
Homily, Sunday 13 February 2022
Trust in the Lord

It is Valentine's Day tomorrow. We have quite a lot of talk going around the themes of love, trust, partnership, and companionship. Through it all one pertinent question props up.

On whom or what are we putting our trust today? On whose side are you leaning on? How many of us would be able to sing along- I am the leaning on the Lord's side?

Some people put their Trust in wealth and sometimes it just takes a moment for wealth to take wings and fly off

Some Trust in health and one moment a healthy person can be permanently in bed

Some Trust in reputation but one wind, one incident can change it all

Some Trust in academic degrees, but one moment all that could turn not enough to carry you through life.

Some trust in love, only to realise later how deceptive love can be.

What does it then mean to Trust in God?

Jeremiah is often called the weeping prophet because of his emotional engagement with the pride of the people when they lived as 'islands unto themselves' disregarding the ways of the Lord and later the pain of the people due to their experiences of exile and resultant agony caused by the Egyptians and the Babylonians. Warning them about the need to stay close to God he is drawing out in this passage the blessing of walking with God and the challenges if they chose not to. While proclaiming the extended period of God's patience and mercy calling the people to Turn to God Jeremiah does not mince words in talking of the consequences if they do not.

Jeremiah 17: 7-8 tells us of six blessings of trusting in God while in the pericope that we read he also points at the challenges of not being able to trust in God

Now what are those six blessings

1. They are Like Trees Planted by the Water:

Have you seen God? May I narrate the experience of a German tourist who visited India during a lean period. He wanted to understand the life of the people and one conscious decision was to avoid bottled water- both because of plastic and the exploitation of natural resources that go behind the same. Waking up one morning from his tent he wanted to get some water and was surprised when told that the nearest water source was a few miles away. He walked. And as he was being tired, he saw a young mother walking in with two pots of water in her head. He realised that she was carrying it home from a long distance. But out of desperation he asked for some water. She stopped. Gave him enough water, smiled and walked back to fetch water again for her home. In that smile the tourist writes I saw the smile of God

Being brought up in a context where in our taps we have 24X7 uninterrupted supply of clean water we sometimes take water for granted. We do not realise the

preciousness of water. Neither do we realise the blessing of a tree planted by the water.

However how many around us can claim they are like a tree planted by the spiritual streams of the Divine. Are our inner beings planted by the streams.

Parched souls and Thirty spirits in a healthy body!! This could be a verbal painting of some of our lives.

Jeremiah says those who are able to trust in the Lord-

They shall be like a tree planted by the water. In contrast to the shrub in the salt-land of the desert or wilderness it lives constantly by the ever available stream of water.

Trusting in God you are able to live like a tree that is planted by a living stream.

2. They are Like Trees with Roots in the Stream

The greatest strength of any tree lies in the roots though its beauty may lie in its shoots. The stronger the roots the tree is able to withstand the winds the better. We have heard of two parents. One so cared their children that they protected them from all evil forces. Did home schooling wanting the children not to be corrupted by the world.

The neighbour on the other hand left their children to fend for themselves. Symbolically both planted a tree each on either side of the fence. The better parent ensured that every day the plant is watered twice, and all minerals provided. The other man, typical of himself never bothered. However, both trees grew, the well-watered one perhaps more pretty.

A strong wind blew one day. And surprisingly the well looked after tree was the first to fall. The uncared for tree stood.

They looked at reasons and found that the well looked after tree did not have enough roots. It just got everything unlike the other tree which had to send its roots far and wide to gather enough nourishment and, in the process, strengthening it.

To Send out the roots by the stream- Being rooted and grounded by the stream is important. O I am reminded of the phrase- Being rooted and grounded in Love.

They shall send out its roots by the stream. Nourishment is crucial to growth. We have quite a lot of discussion about mal-nutrition in the poorer sections of the society and its impact on community health. Nourishment has a multi-dimensional framework. Even as physical nourishment is important, we should be assessing a persons' mental nourishment, intellectual nourishment, emotional nourishment and spiritual nourishment. For those who put their trust in God the wholistic nourishment would be like the tree whose roots travel by the streams.

The importance of being rooted and grounded is also crucial in our identity. If you are sure of where you come from, you will be sure of where you are heading to.

In multi cultural contexts like ours one of the greatest challenges in the identity building of our children would be on the understanding of their roots and sense of belongingness. Roots therefore are crucial in our self-understanding.

Are we able to live rooted and grounded in Christ? A more important question is Do we help our children being rooted and grounded in Christ?

3. They Have No Fear when Heat Comes

It shall not fear when heat comes. Normally a bad summer is a nightmare for some trees. It just cannot survive the heat. But once you are equipped to face the heat then no heat becomes a real threat. The leaves might stoop but only to come back to freshness soon.

This is true in our lives too. Living without fear is not easy. In one of the recent surveys on fear there were quite a lot of new fears that emerged

PlesioPhobia- Fear of the Neighbour

Nomophobia- Fear of being without access to your Phone

Cenophobia- Fear of Empty Rooms (fear of being quarantined)

FOGO- Fear of Going Out- just to name a few.

It IIC Syndrome- the Is It Corona Syndrome at any discomfort that we may feel

Fear of the Needle, Fear of Vaccination, Fear of the Antigen Tests, Fear of Going to Church, Fear of your spouse going to church, Fear of children going to church. the list can go on.

The pertinent question is when is it that fear grips us. It is surely when the heat becomes unbearable.

But for a tree by the stream heat does not bother it much because it knows that there is the inner resilience required to withstand any heat wave.

This is very true in our lives too. The scripture is replete with the phrase- Fear Not!!! Yet we become fearful at some points in life and therein trust in the Lord plays an important role. God dependence gives us the strength needed to face any heat waves in life.

4. Their Leaves Stay Green

Its leaves shall stay green. One of the most common laments that we hear is the phrase- how green was my valley. It is a nostalgic retreat into the past wherein you think those were the days!! Even when you celebrate the pink of health you are worried about the withering away of the leaves. I had dinner with an elderly person this week who said- though my body is becoming weak my spirit is becoming stronger and stronger each day.

Staying Green means more than musing over a past, you think of making the now count.

Staying Green means more than being worried about the future, you face the now with great resilience

Staying Green means, you try to see the now as the best opportunity, while agreeing how good the past was and affirming that the best is yet to be. Staying Green is Staying Fresh despite the tempests of life.

How does trusting in God help us achieve this? An octogenarian at 80 told his GP. Doctor I think my life is done. The GP said- Are you not a Christian. Do you not know that God called Moses to the great act of liberation when was 80. 80 was start age for him. Cheer up. You are yet to begin. And the elderly man said- that was the denouement point in my life.

5. They Are Not Anxious in Drought

Anxiety is one of the greatest threats to humanity today. More people suffer due to depressions and mental health conditions than we could ever imagine. A beautiful short story was about the Seed Store. The messengers planted these seeds in the minds of people. A visitor one day saw the various kinds of seeds used. There were seeds of mistrust, hatred, doubt but the most in demand was the seeds of Anxiety.

Anxiety like fear can take various forms and could lead to psycho somatic disorders. In the years of drought, it is not anxious. Anxiety is a killer. One of the most powerful weapons that affect many of us is Depression that comes alongside Anxiety. Right from Emotional shocks, to stress, trauma, loss or mistreatment the reasons from anxiety could be varied. The contention of Jeremiah the weeping prophet is that if the tree is by the brook, then it is not anxious about the drought. One of the greatest challenges of the church today in its struggle to remain relevant is to be with the people struggling with anxiety. Understanding them, Co-sojourning with them and helping them to find an anchor in Christ.

6. They Never ceases to bear fruit

It does not cease to bear fruits. Another challenge that we need to win over is the sense of worthlessness. This is not an experience of age or circumstances but everyone being able to cherish the spirit of self worth.

One of the first things that caught my attention in the vision for ACF was the ministry of the Wise Ones. Yes People Grow in Age, Yes the physical health deteriorates, Yet none of that need to make someone cease to bear fruit. There is much each person can continue to contribute.

Paul Estabrooks in his Standing Strong Through the Storm devotion talks of Aunty Mei Bo from China. Imprisoned for standing for the gospel she carved verses from the Bible in the prison walls- which the later inmates of the cell found very comforting. Released she went on to mission and kept saying that Jesus was prompting her- Hurry Up I want to come soon. Paul writes of a raid in Aunty Bo's house by the Public Security Police who confiscated lot of Christian material. Aunty came home to see that they had left behind the Jesus Video. Next morning, she went to the office of the Police Chief and told the receptionist she needed to see the chief. On getting her time she handed over the video to him saying- Would you and your staff check on this too if this is acceptable material. Disinterested the Police Chief took the video and gestured her off. She came out rejoicing- How else could I have shared the Jesus story to the Police Chief and his men!

Aunty Boi lived long to equip many for inland mission and mission outside and she never ceased to bear fruit.

Never ceasing to bear fruit is a life commitment for many.

And the question today dear friends is this!!! On whom are we putting our trust today.

Blessed are those who trust in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat

comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.

Vinod Victor
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