

Anglican Church of Freiburg  
Sunday the 20<sup>th</sup> March 2022  
Homily  
Safe-guarding Sunday  
Isiah 55:1-9

What do we mean by a safe space? Is it just a space where the vulnerable is protected from violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation? Or is it much more than that.

When does our private spaces become safe spaces?

When does our homes become safe spaces?

When does our workstations become safe spaces?

When does our neighbourhood become safe spaces?

When does the church become a safe space?

What does a diverse, inclusive, accepting, safe space for everyone look like.

When we invited people to worship today, we sang- Come as you are. Yes, the Church is a space where we should be able to come as we are. We come without fear, we come knowing love sets no limits and love never ends, we come knowing that we need not run away from reality, we need not be ashamed or disheartened, where we are sure that we can rest in the love of God and trust God and each other whatever be our experiences that mark our identity.

We read Isaiah 55 again today in a context of war, pandemic, economic unrest, anxiety, anger, fear and above all in a context where more and more people are feeling unsafe. The prophet is bringing the word of God to a people who have suffered the worst phase of a war, people who were living as refugees, people who were living as captives. The future seemed bleak. Life was difficult in every sense of the word. God's Word comes as words of Comfort. As Words of Hope.

We as the Church today is called to be this presence of Comfort and Hope. We acknowledge that each of the arsenal being used today is destroying much more than its targets- it is taking the right to life and safety of generations yet to be born. The climate damage that it is creating has far reaching implications affecting you and me.

How do we comfort a fleeing people. When dreams of a just new world seems distant and far how would we able to say- we still can see it through the dust, we still can smell it coming near, we still can feel it knocking at our doorstep.

I would rather ask this question- what does it mean to be a safe space today? What does it mean to be the church today? What does it mean to be a community of grace today? What does it mean to be in the Presence of God today?

When God understanding is deconstructed so heavily around us with what credibility can be rebuild the foundations of faith in God to our young generations.

For a wandering soul is the church a safe space to find solace and comfort today.

### **1. The Presence of God is a welcoming and inviting space**

The Prophet Isaiah says- Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price.

The invitation is for everyone who is thirsting. One of the old time war strategies is to cut off supply chains. People have cruelly alienated people from sources of water- because thirst is something most people cannot cope with.

Thirst is not just a physical reality. It is a much deeper spiritual reality. It is an emotional reality- the greatest of the thirsts is the thirst for love and acceptance.

The invitation is to all who do not have the means to buy and eat.

The invitation is to all irrespective of who they are.

Are we as a Church Welcoming and Inviting?

The unknown visitor in the pew who writes in his blog about the churches he visited if asked to describe us in two words- would that be welcoming and inviting.

As persons and as families- are we welcoming and inviting?

The young person came to church agitated as he was. The welcome team received him and an elderly gentleman walked with him to a seat and sat next to him. A few moments later the gentleman saw tears in the boys eyes and held him tighter. The service was over and the boy left immediately. He wrote in his diary. I do not remember the faces of any, I do not remember

anything about the liturgy, I do not remember a word that the preacher was talking about- but I remember the warmth of the hand that held me tight. That was all I needed at that point in my life. Hospitality is love in action.

I received an email yesterday from a dear family that we love. "we have been able to register our home to welcome Ukranian refugees who would like to spend time in this country until they are able to safely return to their own country. Throughout our married life, we have been privileged to be able to open our homes to people from a number of different backgrounds and cultures so this is not strange for us - also we have a big house with only 2 of us living here, so we also have plenty of room." That is the core of Christian hospitality. It is not about having room- it is all about sharing the room.

## **2. The Presence of God is a space wherein we find genuine satisfaction**

Why do you labor for that which does not satisfy?

It is not about the delusion that we talk of a virtue called satisfaction without understanding what it actually means

I have always been intrigued by the verb- to be satisfied.

Epicurus once said- they who are not satisfied with the little they have will never be satisfied with anything.

Yes Bernad Shaw did say- without want, satisfaction could kill.

The question here is very simple- why do you put in all your efforts if at the end of the day- you are not satisfied in your inner being.

Life needs to have a meaning, a purpose and a direction.

Come to me, the Lord says, you will understand what a satisfying life means. It is not about a hefty bank balance or about a mesmerising pay package. It is about love. Its about care. Its about humanity. Its about wiping tears. Its about causing a smile.

There is nothing more rewarding than being the channel of the love of Chirst flowing in and through us to the thirsty. There is nothing more satisfying than looking back and seeing the smile you created in your efforts to build a kingdom of love and justice.

### **3. The Presence of God is a space where we Listen to God and seek the Lord**

Listen carefully to me, Incline your ear, and come to me;  
listen, so that you may live.  
Seek the Lord while he may be found,  
call upon him while he is near

We live in an age where lesser and lesser people with their comfort zones intact are bothered about God talk or the God search. They would not mind their colleagues following the faith path. They would however prefer the no-religion, nothing to do with God- path.

But when difficulties come our way- the God debate takes a new turn.  
Where is God?  
The trauma of survivors several times ask difficult questions about God.  
The invitation here is to all  
Listen carefully to the voice of God  
Incline your ears and come to me  
Listen, so that you may live  
If you seek him now you can find him  
Call upon him, he is near.

Listening to God and seeking God could be challenging questions in a scientific temper. But for all who have gone through the stormy weathers, who seek a space of safety, a space of refuge- this is a life changing call.

### **4. The Presence of God is the space of repentance, mercy and pardon**

let the wicked forsake their way,  
and the unrighteous their thoughts;  
let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them,  
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Wickedness and unrighteousness have many manifestations. Aggression is wickedness. Apathy is equally. Injustice is not just the actions of the wicked it is also the inaction and appalling silence of the just.

What does turning to God mean- It is turning to Life, Love, Justice, Truth and Righteousness

What does turning to God imply- It implies mercy and abundant pardon.

When we talk about justice we must talk about injustices of the past. We must address the injustice done. The pain and agony of victims of injustice. Recompense is an integral element of justice.

Safety discussion is not only about the perpetrators but about the suffering. Repentance therefore is communal. Repentance is structural. Each of us as a community called to repent not just for compliance but also for complacency.

What makes repentance an experience of hope is surely grace, mercy and forgiveness.

Grace is not the licence to continue acts of violations. Mercy is not anyone's absolute right. And forgiveness always is very costly.

Nelson Mandela once said- Reconciliation does not mean forgetting or trying to bury the pain of the past, but it means working together to correct the legacy of past injustice. Forgiveness liberates the soul, it removes the fear. It is a powerful tool.

### **5. The Presence of God is the space where we try to comprehend the lofty purposes of God for our lives and for others**

For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.  
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

One of the beauties of the walk with God is its mysteries. We quite often do not comprehend the thoughts of God or the ways of God. Sometimes it takes years for us to understand why we go through some hard experiences now.

When life takes risky turns and we gaze at the horizon not knowing which path to tread just trust in this promise- My ways are not your ways.

When we try and say we would have preferred to travel this particular way God thought comes to us promising – my ways are higher than your ways.

It is this lofty vision that help us dream dreams of a kingdom of justice and love even when we see injustice and hatred around us.

The prayer for generations yet to be  
Hope for the children yet to be.  
Pray they may find years free from war.  
Let us make ploughshares of all swords,  
Harvesting life healed evermore.

*Hope for the children everywhere,  
We'll build with them a world of peace.*

That's why each time as we close our worship we pray- The Lord Bless You and Keep You and Make His face to shine upon you and give you peace.

The text concludes with a song of rejoicing when the trees and the fields clap their hands and we are left with the question we started with  
What does it mean to be a safe space  
How do we make our spaces safe spaces

Vinod Victor  
March 20, 2022