

**Anglican Church of Freiburg**  
**First Sunday of Lent**  
**March 6, 2022**  
**Homily**  
**World Day of Prayer**

**The Promise of a Future**

We decided to use the World Day of Prayer liturgy for our Sunday service thinking of focusing on prayer. But the Ukraine situation changed the plot. Revised sets of intercessions were sent across to make the service relevant.

For those privileged people who have never been at the receiving end of a war all the news that we hear could at most lead to righteous indignation, sadness, anger, pain or anguish. Given a choice we would all want to keep God out of such situations because we would prefer to see God as pro-life and against all manifestations of death.

The key verse that the world meditated on this year was “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”

In every abyss of life there is room for hope

In every dream about the future there is space for hope

In every brokenness there is space for rebuilding

In every fleeing there is possibility of coming back

Hope is the last thing a person loses before they are defeated

Here despite the ugliness of the pages of the now- God keeps affirming

I know I have plans for you

Plans for your welfare and not for harm

To give you a future with hope.

We look at the context of the letter from Jeremiah. The weeping prophet is in a context where mass exodus is happening. Jeremiah was addressing a people of exile. Trying to give them hope amidst the despair and despondency that was naturally stepping in

Many people including the king and the king’s mother and the cream of the community had left Jerusalem and were in Babylon and its allied towns.

There was no hope of restoration of the future in sight. Jeremiah writing to them tries his best to instil hope. He keeps affirming. Trust in God. Do not give up hope.

We read this text today specially in the context of a war where thousands of people are seeing their dreams being shattered and lives being squeezed. There is lot of pain. There is exile. There is a new refugee crisis. There are people seeing asylum in new cities.

People who have earlier fled the nations look at the new influx and sigh- O No. Not Again.

Jeremiah in his letter to the people in exile suggests few tips to hold on to hope.

### **Pray for the city you are placed in**

Of the many touching moments and prayers that we were witnesses these days around war and the faith response around it one of the most poignant came from an ordinary believer in Kiev who prayed. Lord help us not to hate.

People travelled not knowing where they were going and the humanitarian response was overwhelming.

When everything around looks so grim how do we hold on to light.

Jeremiah suggests- pray for the cities you settle in.

As they settle in the new lands they were forced into the Lord tells them "But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."

Praying for the cities that you are placed in and seeking its welfare.

Many of us are in this city today because God had a plan and purpose for the same. I believe that it was not sheer coincidence or an aberration that you and I are in this city. God has a purpose.

In each of our lives God has a purpose. Imagine the first day you landed in Freiburg. Some even did not have a job. There were quite a lot of anxious moments but across the years the Lord had been good to each of us in special ways

Not that we did not have tough patches to tread but through it all God guided.

Take a closer look at the context of the text. Here the city is that of the aggressors- the Babylonians. It would be like the citizens of a besieged city taken to the invaders town and asked to stay there and then asked to pray for the city. It is not an easy task.

But what it primarily does is that it takes the hatred away. It takes the sense of avenging away. But instead seeks positive vibes amidst challenging times.

Praying for the enemy is a tough call. Abraham Lincoln once said- I destroy my enemies by making them my friends.

Pray for the city you are in. In its welfare shall be your welfare.

Do we pray for our city?

If we pray what do we pray for our city?

What is truly the welfare of the city?

What is truly the spiritual well-being of the city that the faith community is called to be responsible for.

Freiburg could be the greenest city, the warmest city but in the faith map of Germany and Europe where is our city placed.

Pray for the city in which you live.

## **Be Aware of False Teaching**

False teachings can have its sway in every context of history. But it has its greatest influence when people are most vulnerable and susceptible. When all is well- people could say- God is dead. When nothing is well-people would say- Where is God.

In the context of the war too we have heard these question- Where is God in all of these? Why is God allowing so much of suffering?

We also heard powerful testimonies how God of Life and Light is sustaining people in faith through the darkest valleys of death and flight.

Jeremiah gauges the context right and he writes to the people in pain- Do not let the prophets and the diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I have not sent them, says the Lord.”

What then is the solution- each one of you should be able to listen to the voice of God interacting with you. When preachers preach, like the Bereans did you should be able to receive the word with all readiness of mind and search the scriptures daily whether those things were so.

Friends, we should be able to use the Scripture as the touchstone to decide whether the teaching is appropriate or not.

While there is no doubt that physical health, intellectual health and emotional health are crucial for the life of a person, it is as important to think of spiritual health.

We ensure that our families have a healthy diet but do we ensure that our families have a healthy spiritual diet where the parents and children sit around and feast on the Word of God and experience that it is sweeter than the sweetest honey.

How do we sift false teachings in difficult contexts like the one we are going through now?

## **Trust in God's Timing**

The questions that linger in our minds when we travel through tough situations vary. A close friend of mine returned home after turbulent few days from Kiev. He shared with me his train of thoughts  
When the shadow of the war started casting they said  
Will there be a war? They found solace -probably not  
But when the Russians marched in they said- Will we be safe- probably not  
Then they were asked to be ready for evacuation  
A tough journey by road and train to the borders, then to Maldovala, then to Romania and then an air force plane taking them home.  
A tedious bus journey from the nearest airport to home.  
On the way they heard of one of their close friends shot dead  
Life through bunkers braving hard weather was not easy.  
When will be Home? They asked and the only answer we could give them was- Trust in God's timing.

They reached home yesterday and is surely not thinking of returning for now. But having just a few more weeks to complete their graduation it is a natural question- will be ever be able to return and complete the studies. Our only answer is Trust in God's timing.

“For thus says the Lord: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.

The prophet gives the people the hope of returning home but in God's terms and in God's time and is thus encouraging them to reconcile with reality not losing their trust in God.

## **Hold On to the Promise of a Hopeful Future**

The crux of the passage is the assurance “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”

To a people devastated the promise of the prophet was simple. There is a design in all the chaos that you see around.

We had recently a celebration of people living with disabilities and a small team was asked to prepare a theme and they came up with a theme that led to quite a lot of pondering- Disability as a Design of the Divine Master craftsman.

Whatever is happening we are consoled by the voice of the Lord- My plans for you are for your well-being and not for harm.

When Gold goes through fire- it is for a purpose of its purification.

A story is said of a beautiful flower pot in the king's chamber. One day as the people were admiring its beauty it narrated its story saying- the journey was not easy.

I was just ordinary clay when the potter came one day and took me out. No! I cried. He just smiled.

I was then trampled underfoot and malleted. I cried out. No! and he just smiled and said- Not yet.

I was then taken into the potter's wheel and it was painful I tell you as he worked on me. I cried. No! and he just smiled and said Not yet.

As I was shaped up I was put into a furnace. I cried. No! and he just smiled and said Not yet.

He took me out of the furnace and then put cold paints on me. I cried. No! and he just smiled and said Not yet.

He put me back into the furnace and this was too much. I cried. No! and he just smiled and said Not yet.

Taking me out he walked to the palace. I was surprised. Why am I going to the palace. He handed me over to the king who marvelled at the beauty and rewarded the potter.

Before going back he told me

If I had not taken you out of the marsh- you would have remained a marshy mess

If I had not trampled and malleted you- I would never have been able to work on you

If I had not used the potter's wheel- I would never have given you this beautiful shape  
If I had not put you through the furnace- you would have remained brittle  
If I had not painted you- the beauty would not be yours  
If I had not given you a second seasoning in the furnace the paints would not have been as beautiful  
You are now in the king's chamber because through it all the potter had a plan- plan for your good and not your harm- a plan for your future of hope.

Yes friends going through the furnace is never easy and the greatest consolation is the hope that God is working on us to shape us to what we ought to be.

### **Be assured of a Restored Relationship with the Lord**

Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes.

The World Day of Prayer is celebrated this year where fewer and fewer people are calling upon the Lord, coming and praying. For an already dwindling church the pandemic came as a catalyst that hastened the downhill journey.

Jeremiah reminded the people- to truly find God you must seek him with all your heart.

It would be worthwhile asking do we seek God with all our heart. How much of your heart belongs to God.

Take a close look at a testimony

I asked myself the question and realised it was 100 percent of me and zero percent of God

Then at a point it was 20 percent God and 80 percent me

Then through tough patches I grew in faith 50 each

Then it was 80 God and 20 me

Till finally I prayed No Longer I but You live in me. My Life is 100 percent thine

Note Jeremiah's words- I will let you find me, says the Lord. And if the Lord lets us find him, where ever we try and hide he will reach us. That is the beauty of prayer. It is not we seeking out God it is God seeking us out and letting us find him.

“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”

The war will make all of us ask several questions across these days and we will need to find ways to understand this important statement of Jeremiah and make it relevant for us in the present times.

Vinod Victor  
March 6, 2022