

## **Anglican Church of Freiburg**

Sunday the 24<sup>th</sup> April 2022

Homily

John 20:19-31

### **Prelude**

We celebrate the joy of Easter in a context of despair and despondency across the world. As we are resurrecting from the lock downs that the pandemic thrust upon us, we realise life is not the same as it used to be. The agony of the war, the pain of mass graves, the angst of the refugees as the initial enthusiasm to welcome seems to die down, the ripple effects on the lives of people all over the world and the 'fear' of the people about the now and the morrow are inexplicably complex. We read again John 20:19-31 in a context of fear, helplessness, sorrow, loneliness and anguish. The experience of the disciples with the Risen Lord brings to our mind several thoughts that would give us hope.

### **The Presence**

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them.

Let us note those words again, evening, doors of the house locked, fear of the Jews. Evening, is the time when darkness starts finding its way in. The sun has gone down. Though the hope of the new morn would be a comforting thought, for several people today- darkness is a painful reality.

To add to that darkness is being locked down in a house. Well, we have gone through experiences of lock downs during the pandemic times but this is a far complex reality. Hiding from the others. Do we not know several people hiding from themselves, hiding from others, hiding from God. The insensitivity of humanity that started in Eden in attempting to hide from the Divine- the source of all life happens around us even today. People are hiding.

And the reason for the hiding is FEAR. The Jews had got rid of Jesus and now they are aiming at the disciples. The power-hungry Romans would do anything to destroy traces of revolt or questioning of authority. It was clear that the state- the intruder- would come searching for them. Fear was a

chilling reality in their midst. If it was “I cannot breath” that epitomized the fear of the people as this year began today is the cry- “not a fly shall escape”. Living in fear is a chilling reality- a nail biting experience.

We are told in the gospel that in that situation, Jesus came and stood in their midst. No door, nor lock could stop him. He could not but come and be with his dear disciples.

The beauty of resurrection is this presence. Are we able to experience this presence of Jesus in our day to day life? Are we able to feel the presence of Jesus in our worship services? Are we able to enjoy the bliss of Jesus in our Eucharist? Are we able to encounter Jesus in our diakonia knowing that the little we do to the least of these we do it unto Jesus? This presence that we experience is the essence of Easter.

## **The Peace**

Let us read on

Jesus said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

Jesus knew what his disciples needed most at that point of time was Shalom! Peace and it is this peace that he offers unto them.

Jesus then shows them his wounds. Wounds are the windows through which the love of God penetrates our souls. Wounds are hard to comprehend. But the grace of God is best manifest in the wounds. People who have gone through experiences of wounds, be it physical, mental, spiritual or social here is Jesus coming by, showing them the wounds and telling them- I have gone through it all. Their doubts are being transforming into faith and confidence.

We are told of a saint who saw a dream and in the dream were several figures of Jesus inviting him to come and follow. He said- it took just a moment of wisdom to recognize the hand of Jesus from the many hands that were stretched out before me and that was the fact that one of those hands hand wound marks of the nail.

The disciples rejoiced when they saw Jesus. Their sorrow was turned into joy. This transition is the beauty of resurrection. One of the painful realities of the world today is that the happiness index is not being monitored. The sorrow of the people many a times remains a private pain. They grieve the sorrow not even able to share it with anyone. Jesus comes by and the very presence transforms the sorrow.

The disciples had thought that everything is over. But Jesus offers them a new beginning, a new sense of direction. As the father has send me so I send you, Jesus tells them and they would recall that Jesus had made his mission clear- the Son of Man is come so that they might have life and have it in abundance.

Note the transformation that the resurrection brings in. Doubt-Confidence, Sorrow to Joy, Turbulence to Tranquility, Sense of Ending to a Sense of New Beginning, Loss of direction and purpose to a new direction and purpose in life. The Peace that Christ offers is far deeper than human comprehension. The Church is called to be the agent and catalyst of this transformation.

## **The Power**

When Jesus had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

We often hear people say- I feel very down today!!! I feel very weak today. Friends, in the complexity of life around us feeling weak and powerless is a poignant reality. The mental health complexities people live with around us and among us today are far beyond what we can truly comprehend. The spirit of weakness takes over when anxiety and fear grips in.

Here is the Risen Lord breathing Life afresh on them. Here is the Risen Lord breathing the Holy Spirit on them. Here is the Risen announcing the forgiveness of sins that they must share.

Many of us need today a fresh breath of the Risen Lord.  
Many of us need today a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit.  
Many of us need today a fresh sense of evangelistic responsibility.  
Many of us need today an unleashing of Divine Power

What made the disciples so weak? We could find parallels if we look at the weakness we encounter around us today. The trauma that they experienced witnessing the violent and brutal murder of their dear Lord just a couple of days ago. Violence can be traumatizing far beyond we can think of. In the closed room the isolation, the fear, the stigma they faced added to the agony of bereavement of their dear one. Their stress levels could have been high, the close encounter with death could have been agonizing.

Have we heard this? I feel weak on Monday, weak on Tuesday, weak on Wednesday, weak on Thursday too. Weak on Friday, Saturday Sunday, weak the whole week through.

Easter is a call to receive a fresh power. There is work to be done and we cannot afford to be weak.

### **The Pragmatism**

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

Jesus experience is primarily a very personal and intimate experience. Thomas was not among them when Jesus came. The disciples were excited when they told him- We have seen the Risen Lord. But Thomas said unless that experience be my experience, unless I put my finger in the mark of the nails I will not believe.

Friends, the reason I appreciate several of our young people today when they tell us that they have not had the God experience yet is because they are truthful. They do not want to play act with faith and God. They do not want to act holy.

The pragmatic statement that is evident here is this. I refuse to take your God experience as mine. I should have mine own God experience. The touch of his wounds- so that I would accept that those wounds were for me.

We do sing of a Ten Thousand reasons why we glorify God. But around us there are many who cannot find even one reason. That should burn our

hearts but the good news is that the Lord loves each of them equally as much if not more and keeps reaching out to them.

## **The Proclamation**

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

The beauty of Easter is that the Risen Lord comes searching for the seekers. The Risen Lord invites us to put your fingers in his wounds and see. The Risen Lord exhorts us Do not doubt but believe. Then Thomas cried out- My Lord and My God. This is the response to the Easter encounter that you and I need to constantly make before the presence of the Almighty one- My Lord and My God.

Is Christ the Lord of our lives today? Is Christ the Lord of all that we have including our time and our resources?

And Thomas cried out- My Lord and My God!!

Thomas then went on to be a channel of transformation across the world, specially to the part where I come from- so the legend goes. The River that Thomas proclaimed is the prayer of you and me today

O healing river, send down your waters.  
Send down your waters upon this land.  
O healing river, send down your waters,  
To wash the blood from off the sand.

This land is thirsting. This land is parching.  
No seed is growing in the barren ground.  
This land is thirsting, this land is parching.  
O healing river, send your waters down.

Let the seed of freedom awake and flourish,  
Let the deep roots nourish. Let the tall stalks rise.  
Let the seed of freedom awake and flourish,  
Proud leaves uncurling against the skies.

### **Postlude**

As a postlude I would like to tell you- ACF has a purpose in Freiburg and that purpose is to proclaim the presence of the Risen Lord to the world around us. The Call to be Present with the People in their Fears, the Call to help them find the Peace of Christ. The Call to be the channels of the Power of God empowering people to share forth- We have seen the Risen Lord.

The call to come and join the team is loud and clear. Two responses- Not me find somebody else. And the other- I am available Lord to join in the continuum. We thank the Lord for all who led us thus far wonderfully well. We thank the Lord for all those who are deciding to step down. We thank the Lord for those among us who led by the Holy Spirit would dare to say Yes to be part of the leadership roles of ACF. The Lord is calling you and the answer should be where shall I sign in the nomination forms.

Vinod Victor

April 24, 2022