

Preaching during Serenity Prayer Mass
Creating a Safe Situation for Dealing with Difficult Topics

By

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Abstract

We live in a time when we carry difficult existential issues with us due to pandemic, climate crisis and escalating polarization. This thesis is about exploring how the preacher can contribute to a sense of security for the listener in the preaching situation even when the topics of the sermons are thought provoking and challenging. The homiletical framework used in the research is Prophetic Preaching, which I have presented through several different homeliticians, but my focus is primarily on Prof. Leonora Tubbs Tisdale and Prof. Frank A. Thomas. The cognate field in this thesis is Gestalt Therapy. With the intention of understanding how safe situations can be created, according to Gestalt Therapy, I have used some of the key concepts and theories presented by Gestalt therapists Fritz Perls, Jorge Rosner, and Serge Ginger. The findings in this thesis show that it is possible to create a safe atmosphere in the room while preaching on difficult topics even if there are some variations on what is perceived as a safe sermon situation.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Background

I am an ordained pastor in The Church of Sweden since 2004. I did the first part of my doctoral journey within the ACTS DMin program at the Fjellstedtska School Qualified Swedish Preaching Program in Uppsala (2012 – 2014). At the time, I served as pastor in the Parish of S:t John, Diocese of Lund, Sweden. It is a parish in the middle of the third largest city in Sweden, Malmö, which is situated in the south.

When starting my first preaching project The Church of S:t John was open in the evening and early night between 9 pm until 1 am every second Friday, except during the summer vacation. We called those evenings Night Church, and every Friday evening had a separate theme. People could come to talk or just have a cup of coffee or tea. The theme of the evening was always displayed through some kind of artistic expression interpreted by musicians, actors, dancers or an art exhibition. Since it was at night it was always quite dark in the church but with many candles lit a special atmosphere was created. At 10 pm we celebrated Mass with the preaching pertaining to the same theme as the whole evening. It was during this time that I realized that the way I preached during the Mass celebrations at Night Church was different compared to how I preached at the regular Sunday morning High Mass. I had a notion that my preaching was more postmodern at Night Church than during Sunday morning services. I investigated this and reflected on it in my first sermon project.¹

During the project, I noticed that my preaching style had changed from being focused on teaching to being more of a sharing. I dared to be more personal and shared some of my own experiences and thoughts. The effect that this difference in preaching created was that the sermon became part of a conversation rather than a one-way communication. In the report I wrote: *I feel that the postmodern preaching style makes a difference in the High Mass. The Parish Project Group has testified that they experience a clear participation in the*

¹ Wäreborn, I., *Om att använda nattens språk på dagen; en studie i att predika postmodernt i högmässan* [On Using the Language of the Night during the Day. A Study in Preaching Postmodern in the High Mass]. Project Report, Qualified Swedish Preaching Program in Sweden. (Uppsala, 2013).

*sermon. One reason for this may be that I so clearly renounce interpretive precedence. The sermon triggers new thoughts and memories and creates space for one's own reflections. Maybe it is the case that a personal story breeds new personal stories and that when I dare to be more personal, the worshiper also feels invited to listen on a personal level.*²

The report ends with the following thought: *I think the main strength of the postmodern preaching form is that it creates participation, and that it feels open. The sermon does not end when the creed begins. That's when it starts in earnest.*³

This insight has meant a great deal to my continued preaching. The discovery that the listeners participation increased when I dared to be more personal made me want to continue to investigate this in my second preaching project. I was curious to explore how my full presence in the room as a preacher could contribute to a greater presence in the room for all the listeners.

Sometimes, while preaching a sermon, something happens. I experience a condensed atmosphere in the room. It is as if everyone is breathing in unison and the concentration is tangible in the room. The words become like an elastic bridge between the preacher and the listeners. The experience is that when I as a preacher am present, the congregation is present, and that is when God's presence is palpable. The focus of my second sermon project was to try to find out what it was that created this feeling in the room. This sense of presence is, of course, not scientifically measurable, but I still tried to find out if I could evoke this feeling of triple presence through my way of preaching.

My purpose in my second preaching project was to investigate whether one can talk about a common experience of presence in the room or whether it was personal. I also wanted to

² Wäreborn, I., *Om att använda nattens språk på dagen; en studie i att predika postmodernt i högmässan*. Project Report, Qualified Swedish Preaching Program in Sweden. (Uppsala, 2013) 18.

³ Wäreborn, I., *Om att använda nattens språk på dagen; en studie i att predika postmodernt i högmässan*. Project Report, Qualified Swedish Preaching Program in Sweden. (Uppsala, 2013) 18.

investigate whether I, as a preacher, can in any way consciously prepare and create conditions for this feeling of presence to arise⁴.

During my second preaching project I worked together with Petra Lindblom, who is a drama teacher and Gestalt Therapy therapist. After the sermon was written, but before the actual service, I met with Lindblom in the church and preached the sermon only to her. Then we discussed how we could, from the perspective of theater, increase a sense of presence by adjusting my way of speaking, my placement in the church and my body language.

I learned the importance of eye contact with the worshippers during the sermon, both for the experience of my own presence and the listener's presence.⁵

I never experienced the palpable triple presence during the second sermon project. I think I was too busy preaching by heart and at the same time incorporating the theatre techniques that Lindblom and I had talked about, so I found myself more in my head than in the feeling. But during the project I received confirmation from the Parish Project Group that I was perceived as more present and that it seemed to strengthen the listeners' attention and own sense of presence. I also found that many of the times when the listener had felt present, it had coincided with a sense of God's presence. However, not always.⁶ I did notice, though, that there was a common thread between my two first preaching projects. The common thread is that both projects have the aim to see if I as a preacher, through a specific style of preaching, can consciously create an atmosphere that contributes to the possibility of an authentic encounter between the immanent and the transcendent, between worshipper and God.

The difference between my previous sermon projects and this thesis is that, by using the common thread of presence from the previous preaching projects as a foundation, I want to

⁴ Wäreborn I., *På spaning efter en trefaldig närvaro; En studie av den upplevda närvaron under predikan* [In Search of a Triple Presence. A study of the perceived presence during the sermon]. Project Report, Qualified Swedish Preaching Program in Sweden. (Uppsala 2014).

⁵ Wäreborn I., *På spaning efter en trefaldig närvaro; En studie av den upplevda närvaron under predikan*. Project Report, Qualified Swedish Preaching Program in Sweden. (Uppsala 2014), 28.

⁶ Wäreborn I., *På spaning efter en trefaldig närvaro; En studie av den upplevda närvaron under predikan*. Project Report, Qualified Swedish Preaching Program in Sweden. (Uppsala 2014), 29.

explore how I can preach so that the listener experiences a sense of safety in the preaching situation. By safety I mean that the listener can experience a sense of security and can therefore also maintain the sense of presence so as to be able to listen actively and deeply absorb the message of the sermons even if the theme of the sermon deals with difficult topics that can be challenging and trigger deep feelings that may make a person uncomfortable.

Focus of the Thesis

The focus of this thesis is about delivering a sermon in a way that makes the listeners feel safe and open to the words even if the topic brought up in the sermon is challenging and thought provoking and may deal with sensitive issues that trigger painful feelings.

Since November 2018 I serve as vicar in the Parish of Vinslöv. I am still in the south part of Sweden, but in a smaller parish and a more rural area. In Vinslöv Parish, we have celebrated Serenity Prayer Mass every second Thursday evening, since the spring of 2021. In the autumn 2021, when the sermons connected to this preaching project were delivered, because of the COVID-19 restrictions, we were only allowed to gather maximum 75 participants in Vinslöv Church which was where the Serenity Prayer Masses are celebrated.

I want to develop the Serenity Prayer Mass to become a place of trust and relevance in a world where difficult topics affect us in different ways. I want to create a safe space with my preaching during the sermon to make it possible for people to talk about difficult issues that can be felt in our society and in our life situations. I want to particularly explore how I speak, how I move, and how I am present so I can cultivate a safe situation where it is possible to preach about challenging themes pertaining to life and the world at large and still maintain hope. I want to radiate warmth and safety in order to be able to talk about thought provoking topics that deal with the difficulties in life during the sermon. I want the preaching to be honest, brave, deep and relevant to all of us who struggle with our worries and concerns.

The safe preaching situation is the aim. Preaching about difficult topics that bring up challenging issues that are thought provoking and that may be painful will be one of the methods used to test if there is a safe atmosphere in the church during the sermon. It will be like a sort of litmus paper which will help to indicate if the safe feeling can remain even if the topic is uncomfortable.

The Thesis Question

The aim of this study is to look for answers to the following question:

How can I, as a preacher, create a safe preaching situation for the listener?

During my doctoral journey in the ACTS DMin program I have developed my way of preaching by listening to the Bible text's direct address to me as a preacher and to the congregation, thereby daring to trust the text's personal address. I have also developed my way of delivering the sermon so that presence and contact arise in the room. The form of preaching I want to try this on is the Serenity Prayer Mass and the tools I want to try are Prophetic Preaching, Gestalt Therapy, and preaching without notes.

The Project Material and Method

The focus of this project is to try to see what can contribute to a sense of security for the listener in the preaching situation. By safe preaching situation I mean that the listener gets as good conditions as possible to be able to concentrate, open up, and relate to the sermon. I think this safe condition has a possibility of being created if the preacher conveys serenity and a presence, which creates a connection with the congregation.

To find out what it is that makes difficult topics so challenging, I have read Professor Charles Campbell book, *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*,⁷ that describes the powers and principalities that draw us away from God. As I understand, it is these Powers and Principalities that make thought provoking topics so difficult.

⁷ Campbell C., *The Word Before the Powers*.

Since the sermon themes are going to make use of difficult topics that are challenging, I thought that the prophetic sermon style was a good starting point for the sermons I will give. From the various models that the academic world discusses, I think that Prophetic Preaching helps the preacher to speak in an honest and forthright way about difficult topics. My American advisor, Dr. Kimberly Wagner, suggested the book *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*⁸ by Leonora Tubbs Tisdale. In this book, Tisdale describes different definitions of what preaching is,⁹ resistances to Prophetic Preaching,¹⁰ and strategies for how Prophetic Preaching can be performed so that people really hear and consider what the preacher is saying.¹¹

Part of the course literature during last summer's core course was Professor Frank. A Thomas book, *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon*.¹² His thoughts on preaching dangerous sermons made me interested in reading more so I also read his book, *How to Survive a Dangerous Sermon*,¹³ after being recommended this book by Kimberly Wagner. Thomas writes about preaching on difficult topics that upends and challenge the dominant hierarchies.¹⁴ I had previously read Christine M. Smith's book, *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance*,¹⁵ which is about preaching as an act of redeeming and transforming reality. Smith addresses preaching topics that mention oppressive structures and systems,¹⁶ for example, handicappism,¹⁷ ageism,¹⁸ sexism,¹⁹ and white racism.²⁰

I have chosen Gestalt Therapy as a cognate field in this study because I perceive that Gestalt Therapy's theories, about how contact is created and how we can increase the awareness of being in what is happening in the present, can help me seek answers to the thesis question.

⁸ Tubbs Tisdale L., *Prophetic Preaching. A Pastoral Approach*.

⁹ Tubbs Tisdale L., *Prophetic Preaching. A Pastoral Approach*, 3-10.

¹⁰ Tubbs Tisdale L., *Prophetic Preaching. A Pastoral Approach*, 10-20.

¹¹ Tubbs Tisdale L., *Prophetic Preaching. A Pastoral Approach*, 41-62.

¹² Thomas, F. A., *How to preach a Dangerous Sermon*.

¹³ Thomas, F. A., *How to Survive a Dangerous Sermon*.

¹⁴ Thomas, F. A., *How to Survive a Dangerous Sermon*, xvii.

¹⁵ Smith, C. M., *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance*.

¹⁶ Smith, C. M., *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance*, 3.

¹⁷ Smith, C. M., *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance*, 15-37.

¹⁸ Smith, C. M., *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance*, 38-61.

¹⁹ Smith, C. M., *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance*, 62-86.

²⁰ Smith, C. M., *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance*, 110-134.

I will look into some key concepts of Gestalt Therapy with the intention of understanding how safe situations can be created according to Gestalt Therapy. By continuing the consultations with the drama teacher and gestalt therapist, Petra Lindblom, I can develop the work that I did during the second sermon project with her. Following a recommendation from Lindblom, I have read the books *Gestaltterapi ord för ord [Gestalt Therapy Word by Word]*²¹ and *Det gestaltterapeutiska arbetssättet [The Gestalt Approach]*,²² by the founder of Gestalt Therapy Frederick S. Perls, and the book *Peeling the Onion*,²³ by Jorge Rosner. Through these books I have gained an understanding concerning the importance of creating contact,²⁴ as well as how to achieve a sense of security between people. I have also learned, through conversations with Lindblom, how demonstrated vulnerability can create contact, which led me to read the Gestalt Therapy book, *The Art of Contact*, by Serge Ginger.²⁵

I asked Petra Lindblom in the spring of 2021 if she wanted to share her knowledge in Gestalt Therapy for my project and she agreed. The plan is that we meet twice before each sermon. The first time we talk about the subject of the sermon and the Bible text connected to the sermon. The second time we meet, I will hold the written sermon in advance only for her in Vinslöv Church and after this we will work together on how the sermon can be performed so that the listener may feel that the sermon situation is a safe space.

In my second preaching project I realized that preaching by heart increases the contact between the preacher and the listeners. To increase the feeling of presence, connection, and security in the preaching situation, I will try to preach without notes. I will study the book *Preaching without Notes* by Joseph M. Webb²⁶ and present his theory that a sermon that is held by heart affects the worship participants' experience of the preaching situation. I will use the Parish Project Group as a focus group with whom I will have group interviews directly after the sermons. I will do this because I think they can help me identify important things that happen or do not happen during the sermons. This will help me identify if, or/and

²¹ Perls, F.S., *Gestaltterapi ord för ord*.

²² Perls, F.S., *Det gestaltterapeutiska arbetssättet*.

²³ Rosner, J., *Peeling the Onion*.

²⁴ Rosner, J., *Peeling the Onion*, 35-37.

²⁵ Ginger, S., *Gestalt Therapy: The Art of Contact*.

²⁶ Webb J. M. *Preaching without Notes*.

understand how, I can contribute to creating a safe preaching situation during the sermon.²⁷ During the first meeting they will also answer an Opening Questionnaire, with open-ended questions²⁸ about experiences of feeling safe in general and in connection to sermons.²⁹ The questionnaire will give the members of the Parish Preaching Group the possibility to suggest themes for the sermons in the preaching project.³⁰

For my qualitative research methods, I will use the book by Dr. Nancy Jean Vyhmeister and Terry Dwain Robertson, *Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology*³¹ and the book by Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*.³²

My goal is to give two sermons within this project during the Serenity Prayer Mass in Vinslöv Church. Since the sermons will not be held on Sundays but on Thursday evenings, I can choose Bible texts by myself instead of following the Lectionary of Church of Sweden.

The Outline of the Thesis

In this thesis, the ministerial context will be presented. The Serenity Prayer Mass in Sweden and in the Vinslöv will be described. The homiletical framework for the sermons and the theological theories will be presented. The theories of Gestalt Therapy will be introduced. The preparatory work for the sermon writing with the Gestalt Therapy therapist Petra Lindblom and Parish Project Group will be described and the results will be presented. Finally, the thesis question will be answered by analyzing the results of the two sermons contained in the preaching project.

Chapter One introduces the project of creating a safe preaching situation for the listeners during the Serenity Prayer Mass. In Chapter Two the context in the Church of Sweden and in

²⁷ The members of the Parish Project Group will be presented in Chapter Five.

²⁸ Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, 113.

²⁹ Appendix III.

³⁰ Appendix III.

³¹ Vyhmeister, N.J., and Robertson, T.D., *Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI Zondervan 2020), 51-64.

³² Sensing, T., *Qualitative Research: A multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, 111-124.

the congregation of Vinslöv Church will be presented followed by a description of Serenity Prayer Mass in Sweden and Vinslöv Church. Chapter Three will contain some homiletical definitions in regards to Prophetic Preaching and Dangerous Sermons, as well as obstacles and strategies pertaining to Prophetic Preaching. Chapter Four provides an introduction to Gestalt Therapy and shares thoughts from Gestalt Therapy on how a feeling of security can be created. In Chapter Five, the research, the methodology and the procedure will be presented. I will write about preaching based on difficult topics and how the concept of Powers and Principalities make topics difficult. Thoughts about preaching without notes will be mentioned. I will also present the preparations made together with Petra Lindblom. The methodology with the Opening Questionnaire and the Parish Project Group interviews will be explained and the Parish Project Group feedback after the sermons presented. The reflections from the Swedish advisor Dr. Niclas Blåder and the American advisor Dr. Kimberly Wagner will also be included. In Chapter Six the results and evaluations from the Opening Questionnaire and the group interviews will be presented. In Chapter Seven, I will summarize the collected material in this research and try to answer the thesis question.

Chapter Two

The Context

Introduction

This study is about how to create a safe space for listeners while preaching about difficult topics. As I serve in the Church of Sweden and the sermons for this study will be given during the Serenity Prayer Mass in the parish of Vinslöv I will in Chapter Two briefly present the Church of Sweden, the parish of Vinslöv and the history of Serenity Prayer services in Sweden and Vinslöv.

The Church of Sweden

The Church of Sweden is a religious community with a history that leads back to the oldest Christian congregations and their faith in Jesus Christ. After the Reformation the Church of Sweden became an Evangelical – Lutheran church in 1593.³³ The Church of Sweden is a majority church.³⁴ It is a nationwide church with 13 geographically divided dioceses,³⁵ 1316 congregations³⁶ and 3 400 churches.³⁷ In December 2020 the population in Sweden was 10.379 295 persons³⁸ and just over 5,7 million were members of the Church of Sweden.³⁹ This means that in December 31, 2020, approximately 55% of the Swedish population were members of the Church of Sweden. A century and a half ago the Church of Sweden embraced almost everybody in the country.⁴⁰ This number is shrinking but the Church of Sweden is still a majority church. This is expected to change according to sociologists of religion who estimate that a minority of the Swedish population will belong to the Church of Sweden by in 2026.⁴¹

Although there are still many who are members of the Church of Sweden, not many are active worshippers. Few come every Sunday. More come to church in connection with baptisms, confirmation, marriages, and funeral services. Einar Billing (1871-1939), theologian, author, and Bishop of Västerås wrote already in 1930, in the book *Den Svenska folkkyrkan*, about the difficulties of preaching in a folk church where worshippers change from Sunday to Sunday.⁴² There is a core of worshippers in the parishes who come regularly,

³³ *Kyrkoordning 2021 med angränsande lagstiftning för Svenska kyrkan*, 15.

³⁴ "Sweden". World Council of Churches. Accessed September 13, 2021.

<https://www.oikoumene.org/countries/sweden>

³⁵ "Svenska kyrkan i siffror". [The Church of Sweden in numbers], Svenska kyrkan [Church of Sweden]. Accessed September 13, 2021. <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/statistik>

³⁶ "Svenska kyrkan i siffror". Svenska kyrkan. Accessed September 13, 2021.

<https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/statistik>

³⁷ "Svenska kyrkan i siffror". Svenska kyrkan. Accessed September 13, 2021.

<https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/statistik>

³⁸ "Befolkningsstatistik 2018-2021 (månad) och 1998-2020 (år)". [Population statistics 2018-2021 (month) and 1998-2020 (year)], SCB [Static Central Office]. Accessed 31 January, 2022. <https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/statistik-efter-amne/befolkning/befolkningens-sammansattning/befolkningsstatistik/pong/tabell-och-diagram/manadsstatistik--riket/befolkningsstatistik-2018-2021-manad-och-1998-2020-ar/>

³⁹ "Svenska kyrkan i siffror". Svenska kyrkan. Accessed September 13, 2021.

<https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/statistik>

⁴⁰ Thidevall, S., *Mindre folk – mer kyrka? Möjligheter för Svenska kyrkan i postkristen tid*, 9.

⁴¹ Thidevall, S., *Mindre folk – mer kyrka? Möjligheter för Svenska kyrkan i postkristen tid*, 11.

⁴² Billing, E., *Den svenska folkkyrkan*, 16-18.

but every Sunday there are also some who are unaccustomed to attending church services and who only come occasionally. This requires the preacher to both preach pedagogically, so that everyone understands, but also with substance, so that the regular worshippers feel that they get to deepen their understanding of the Christian faith.

The Congregation of Vinslöv

The congregation of Vinslöv is one of the 1316 congregations in the Swedish Church, which is a part of the worldwide Church and a faith community that stretches beyond the borders of Sweden. The congregation is rather small, compared to other congregations in Sweden, therefore it is important for the congregation to emphasize that we are a part of something bigger than our own geographical area.⁴³

The congregation of Vinslöv is situated in the diocese of Lund, the southernmost diocese in Sweden. It is in and around Vinslöv which is a village. On 31 December 2020 there lived 5,685 inhabitants within the parish and 4,335 were members in the Church of Sweden,⁴⁴ which was 76,3% of the inhabitants. That does not mean that all of them are active or believe, but they belong to the church and many of them come to baptize their children and attend weddings and funeral services. In normal circumstances, when there is not a pandemic, about 50 worshippers come to the first Sunday service in Vinslöv Church and about 12 persons attend the second Sunday service in one of the three other churches in the parish.

The area of our parish is rural. Outside the village is nature, farming and forests. The village is located just between two cities, Hässleholm and Kristianstad. Vinslöv has a socioeconomically and racially homogenous population where most of the inhabitants have jobs, good economy, a house, car and family. There is a train station, which makes it easy to commute to the bigger cities nearby. Many couples move back to Vinslöv when it is time to

⁴³ Svenska kyrkan Vinslövs församlingsinstruktion, Dnr 2020–0744:1, 6

⁴⁴ "Medlemmar i Svenska kyrkan i förhållande till folkmängd den 31.12.2020 per församling, kommun och län samt riket." [Members of the Church of Sweden in relation to population on 31 December 2020 per parish, municipality and county and the kingdom.] Svenska kyrkan. Accessed Januari 31 2022.

[https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/filer/1374643/Medlemsutveckling%202019-2020,%20lan,%20kommun%20och%20forsamling%20samt%20rikt%20\(pdf\).pdf?id=2195458](https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/filer/1374643/Medlemsutveckling%202019-2020,%20lan,%20kommun%20och%20forsamling%20samt%20rikt%20(pdf).pdf?id=2195458)

have children. The houses are quite expensive and there is a lack of housing compared to the demand. It can be argued that it is a challenge for the congregation that the society is so homogeneous since it makes it difficult to get to know people from different cultures and thereby bridge the fear of strangers and change.

There are four churches in the parish: Vinslöv, Nävlinge, Sörby, Gumlösa and there is also one chapel in Vinslöv. Normally, we have services every Sunday at 10 am in the most central church in Vinslöv and at 2 pm we have service or mass in one of the three other churches located in the smaller villages around Vinslöv. We also celebrate morning masses every second Wednesday and Serenity Prayer Mass every second Thursday evening in Vinslöv. I am vicar in the parish and there is one pastor. We preach every second Sunday, as well as, every second morning mass and now and then in the Serenity Prayer Mass.⁴⁵

The Serenity Prayer

This form of worship is named after the Serenity Prayer, which is used in the twelve-step programs, including Alcoholics Anonymous. No one knows for sure who first wrote the Serenity Prayer, but it is associated with the German-American Lutheran theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971) who was a professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York.⁴⁶ The prayer has a longer version⁴⁷ and it is used with different variations.⁴⁸ The variant that is used during the Swedish Serenity Prayer Mass reads:

*God, grant me
the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
the wisdom to know the difference.*⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Vinslövs församling [The parish of Vinslöv], Accessed September 13, 2021.

<https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/vinslov>

⁴⁶ Persson, L. W., *En liten bok om Sinnesrobönen*, 19.

⁴⁷ Persson, L. W., *En liten bok om Sinnesrobönen*, 58

⁴⁸ Persson, L. W., *En liten bok om Sinnesrobönen*, 53.

⁴⁹ "Prayer for Serenity". Celebrate Recovery. A Christ Centered 12 Step program. Accessed February 18, 2022.
<https://www.celebraterecovery.com/resources/cr-tools/serenityprayer>

Serenity Prayer Services in Sweden

In the mid-1950s, the Serenity Prayer was introduced in Swedish and came to be spread in the Swedish AA groups.⁵⁰ The first Serenity Prayer service that was celebrated in Sweden took place on September 27, 1992, in Bromma.⁵¹ Since then, this form of worship has spread throughout the country. I think it is a kind of worship that is a meeting between the twelve-step spirituality and the Christian Church's pastoral tradition. The content does not differ much from other services. The Serenity Prayer services include song and music, Bible reading and preaching, silence, prayer and lighting of candles. Larsåke W. Persson, pastor of the Swedish Baptist Society, St. Luke's therapist, and author of several books, writes that what stands out for the Serenity Prayer services is the atmosphere and those who come to the Serenity Prayer service.⁵² Persson defines the participants of the Serenity Prayer services as crisis conscious and often worship-unaccustomed who seek God to have peace of mind and strength for an uncertain tomorrow.⁵³

Persson describes that what is perhaps most felt in the church is the intention to have a soul-caring atmosphere where the participants are invited to look honestly at their lives.⁵⁴

Serenity Prayer Mass in Vinslöv

When we started having services again after the pandemic, we changed the form of the Thursday evening mass from a more common evening mass to a Serenity Prayer Mass. We started with this kind of service in the evenings because we were longing for meetings between the usual worshippers in the congregation and people that we usually don't see in our ordinary services. We wanted to be relevant and important for people who are not normally comfortable in church. We wanted to share life and talk about relevant issues, as well as preach about topics that the people who participated in the mass had expressed an interest in.

⁵⁰ Persson L. W., *En liten bok om Sinnesrobönen*, 23.

⁵¹ Edgardh, N., *Gud ge mig Sinnesro; Om sinnesrogudstjänstens plats i Svenska kyrkans gudstjänstförnyelse*, Svensk teologisk Kvartalsskrift. Årg 89 (2013), 58.

⁵² Persson, L. W., *En liten bok om Sinnesrobönen*, 73.

⁵³ Persson L. W., *En liten bok om Sinnesrobönen*, s. 74.

⁵⁴ Persson L. W., *Sinnesrogudstjänst – nytt påfund eller pånyttfött bönemöte i Boken om Recovery*, (red. T. Andersson; Örebro: Libris, 1999, 62.

Even though the parish is socioeconomically and racially homogenous, middleclass with a decent economy, that does not mean that life always is easy. When I have spoken to members in the parish, I have heard much fear during the Covid-19 pandemic, fear of becoming ill, fear of being alone, fear of losing work, fear for the economy, fear for the threat of climate change and fear that another pandemic will come along. We, who are working with the Serenity Prayer Mass in the parish, wish to create a space to be able to share this experience with each other and to talk about our worries and difficulties in life. We also want to invite people who travel to or through the area to join the Serenity Prayer Mass, since these kinds of services have become an important and significant part of the 12-Step Recovery Program. The train station is thus important for the Serenity Prayer Mass in Vinslöv since people come to Serenity Prayer Mass from different parts of Skåne, the county of the south part of Sweden.

Before we started having Serenity Prayer Mass, we studied how other congregations used the Serenity Prayer. It felt important that we do the same as other congregations, so visitors recognize themselves no matter where in Sweden you attend a Serenity Prayer Mass. Each Serenity Prayer Mass has a theme that recurs in the sermon, the songs, the music and how the church is decorated. The theme is often based on the wishes expressed by the worship participants. The sermon or *Thought of the Evening*, as we choose to call it, can be given by someone who has been entrusted with sharing their thoughts during the mass. The sermon is followed by a longer silence. After the silent moment there are opportunities to go to various prayer stations in the church where you can light candles, write prayers on notes that are either placed in a basket and later read aloud in the church or placed in a box that without being read aloud is carried to the altar. You can also paint a prayer, place one or more stones in front of the altar as a symbol to leave memories, thoughts, worries or something else over to God. There is also opportunity for a personal intercession in the church. The communion that is celebrated consists of gluten-free bread and grape juice instead of wine, out of consideration for those who cannot receive wine. After the communion we sing and pray the Serenity Prayer together.

The aim is to create an inviting, friendly, open atmosphere where you can feel safe regardless of whether you are a regular worshiper or unaccustomed. Regardless of background, feelings, experiences, and personalities.

Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the context in which I work and in which this study will be conducted. I have written about the Church of Sweden, Vinslöv's congregation and about Serenity Prayer Mass in Sweden in general and in Vinslöv in particular.

In the next chapter, I will present some homelitericians who have written about Prophetic Preaching.

Chapter Three

Homiletical Theories

Introduction

Since the aim of this study is to develop how I, as a preacher, can create a safe space for the listeners during a Serenity Prayer Mass, as well as investigate whether the safe situation can be preserved even when the sermon topic is challenging and may make the listeners uncomfortable, I will study some homelitericians who have written about Prophetic Preaching. Even though there are many opinions on how one can think homiletically about creating safe preaching situations when the theme of the sermon revolves around thought provoking issues, I have chosen to study Prophetic Preaching because in this form of preaching there is a habit and experience of talking about that which is difficult in our lives and in our world in an honest and forthright way. I will therefore use Prophetic Preaching in the two sermons connected to the preaching project.

Definitions of Prophetic Preaching

There are different ways to define what a prophetic sermon is. Tina Johansson and Maria Ottensten, pastors in the Church of Sweden, suggest, in the book *Predikan växer fram* [*Preaching is Emerging*],⁵⁵ that one can look upon Prophetic Preaching as based on the words from Latin American Liberation Theology: *observe, judge and think*.⁵⁶

To *observe* is the first step and it is about being open to the world we live in⁵⁷ and daring to see what many do not want to see or think about.⁵⁸ It is about looking at the shadowy sides of life and listening to the voices of the marginalized who are not heard.⁵⁹

To *judge* is step two and it is about interpreting the situation we have observed in the first step in the light of the Gospels and try to understand where God's will and grace is in this.⁶⁰

To *think* is the third step and it is about reaching an understanding of how we should act for God's will to be done and to let this insight be expressed in action.⁶¹

In conversations with parishioners, I sometimes hear that Prophets are something that no longer exist. That they existed in biblical times, but not anymore. Perhaps the Prophets who gave voice to the Lord, as mentioned in the Bible, are not heard in the same way today, but I believe that the prophetic mission of seeing and responding to social injustices is still very much present.

Philip Wogaman, a Christian ethicist and pastor, gives the following definition: "To be prophetic is not necessarily to be adversarial, or even controversial. The word in its Greek form refers to one who speaks on behalf of another. In Hebrew tradition, a prophet is one who speaks for God."⁶² The prophetic word has existed through the history of God's people. Leah D. Shade, professor of preaching and worship at Lexington Theological Seminary in

⁵⁵ Johansson T., Ottensten M., *Predikan växer fram*.

⁵⁶ Johansson T., Ottensten M., *Predikan växer fram*, 139.

⁵⁷ Johansson T., Ottensten M., *Predikan växer fram*, 139.

⁵⁸ Johansson T., Ottensten M., *Predikan växer fram*, 140.

⁵⁹ Johansson T., Ottensten M., *Predikan växer fram*, 140.

⁶⁰ Johansson T., Ottensten M., *Predikan växer fram*, 140.

⁶¹ Johansson T., Ottensten M., *Predikan växer fram*, 140.

⁶² Wogaman, J. P., *Speaking the Truth in Love: Prophetic Preaching to a broken world*, 3.

Lexington, Kentucky, goes slightly further in her definition when she writes that the word "prophet" literally means "one who comes before another to speak," based on the Greek word *prophetes*, from *pro* meaning "before" and *phenai* meaning "speak."⁶³ Shade believes that it is not only on behalf and before God that a prophet speaks, but also on behalf and before God's people, especially those who are most vulnerable to the systems and leaders that abuse their power.⁶⁴ Shade also writes that Prophetic Preaching has something to say in regards to the concept of "powers and principalities,"⁶⁵ which I understand means that this is a way of preaching that clarifies that the systems of domination will not have the final word.⁶⁶ I also believe that one of the main tasks for Prophetic Preaching is delivering hope. As a preacher I strive to instill hope by showing how God helps us to find ways through difficulties and to envision how God's kingdom finally opens to us completely. I perceive that Walter Bruggeman also touches upon the aspect of hope, when he writes that, "And if the task of prophecy is to empower people to engage in history, then it means evoking cries that expect answers, learning to address them where they will be taken seriously, and ceasing to look to the numbed and dull empire that never intended to answer in the first place."⁶⁷ Kenyatta R. Gilbert, associate professor of homiletics at the Howard University School of Divinity in Washington, DC, describes a connection between social justice and God. He writes: "A preacher who preaches prophetically does not treat social justice as social justice (or other sacred values) as something independent from God but as being rooted in and emanating from God."⁶⁸

It is my understanding that Prophetic Preaching is about daring to address topics that are thought provoking and uncomfortable and that it is be a counterforce against the powers and principalities that want to isolate and divide people and all of creation from God. I perceive that a prophetic sermon has the potential to show ways of deliverance and ways toward God's vision for creation. Prophetic Preaching thus names injustices in the world and calls the preacher to criticize current injustices and to highlight an alternative vision of God's

⁶³ Shade, L. D., *Preaching in the Purple Zone: Ministry in the Red-Blue Divide*, 13.

⁶⁴ Shade, L. D., *Preaching in the Purple Zone: Ministry in the Red-Blue Divide*, 14

⁶⁵ Shade, L. D., *Preaching in the Purple Zone: Ministry in the Red-Blue Divide*, 51.

⁶⁶ Shade, L. D., *Preaching in the Purple Zone: Ministry in the Red-Blue Divide*, 51.

⁶⁷ Brueggeman, W., *The Prophetic Imagination*, 13.

⁶⁸ Gilbert, Kenyatta R., *Exodus Preaching: Crafting Sermons about Justice and Hope*, IX.

future for us and for all of God's creation. It is a challenging and difficult, but an important, task for preachers to dare to speak against oppression and at the same time to talk about God's hopeful vision for God's creation.

Three Obstacles to Prophetic Preaching

Personally, I feel that it is a challenge to choose the prophetic way of preaching. Still, I try. My experience with this form of preaching is that even quiet small expressions of difficult issues can generate strong reactions from some of the listeners.

Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, Clement-Muehl Professor of Homiletics at Yale Divinity School, writes about different obstacles that may stand in the way of the prophetic way of preaching in our congregations.⁶⁹ One obstacle that Tisdale writes about is that some preachers avoid preaching prophetically out of pastoral care and we think that our parishioners cannot bear to hear about more "bad news"⁷⁰ but she believes that it is only when we name, complain, and mourn over what is destructive in our lives that we can be open to God's energizing visions of a new order to come.⁷¹ Another obstacle that can stand in the way of Prophetic Preaching may be fear of conflict. Many priests and pastors regularly deal with conflicts in the congregation and in the work team. Tisdale writes: "Pastors are understandable worn down, worn out, and distracted by the many conflicts that must be mediated in ministry these days and thus it is partly for self-preservation that we avoid prophetic preaching."⁷² A third obstacle Tisdale mentions is fear of being disliked, rejected, and made to pay a price for prophetic witness.⁷³

She writes:

For most pastors I know (including myself), fear lies at the heart of our resistance to bearing prophetic witness – fear of not being liked, fear of rejection, fear of being attacked by those who disagree with us, fear of not being able to adequately defend our point of view, or even fear of losing our jobs. We may also be afraid of damaging

⁶⁹ Tubbs Tisdale L., *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*.

⁷⁰ Tubbs Tisdale L., *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*, 12.

⁷¹ Tubbs Tisdale L., *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*, 13.

⁷² Tubbs Tisdale L., *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*, 14.

⁷³ Tubbs Tisdale L., *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*, 16.

our pastoral relationship with our flock or making those we love pay a high price for our prophetic word and actions.⁷⁴

Although this study is mainly about how I can create a safe space for the listener, I am also concerned with the aspect of maintaining that safe space while preaching about difficult topics and therefore I think it is important to look at what can cause concern for the preacher who wants to approach the Prophetic Preaching style. If the preacher is aware of the obstacles and concerns that a prophetic sermon can generate, the possibility is greater that the preacher can overcome these obstacles and still deliver a sermon that can be perceived as safe to listen to.

Strategies for Prophetic Proclamation

Despite all the obstacles, how can we as preachers talk about challenging topics so that people really hear what we are saying? Tisdale presents ten different strategies to help preachers make Prophetic Preaching more accessible to worshipers.⁷⁵ I choose to refer to three of the ten strategies because I think they fit into my congregation's context.

One strategy is starting with the familiar and moving toward the unfamiliar. The familiar is more comfortable for the listeners so starting with the familiar can open the possibility for listeners to hear about the unfamiliar without immediately becoming defensive and resistant to it.⁷⁶ A second strategy is to invite the hearers to stand in the shoes of another and viewing the world from a different perspective. This can open new worlds of understanding for the listeners.⁷⁷ The third of Tisdale's strategies that I intend to refer to is to choose to stand with the congregation rather than opposite the congregation. She invites the preacher to let the radical word of God talk both to the congregation and the pastor.⁷⁸

Christine M. Smith, Professor of Preaching and Worship at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, New Brighton, Minnesota, uses three keywords to help the preacher deliver

⁷⁴ Tubbs Tisdale L., *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*, 17.

⁷⁵ Tubbs Tisdale L., *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*, 42-62.

⁷⁶ Tubbs Tisdale L., *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*, 44.

⁷⁷ Tubbs Tisdale L., *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*, 46.

⁷⁸ Tubbs Tisdale L., *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*, 49.

sermons in a world that is burdened with oppressive structures and systems. Those keywords are *weeping*, *confession*, and *resistance*.⁷⁹ She writes that in a world filled with human suffering, preaching can be a kind of *weeping*. Preachers need to engage their deepest passions by naming and explaining what oppressions and injustice make us feel.⁸⁰ But weeping is not enough, preaching must also be an act of confession where truth of the oppression is spoken even if the truth is ugly or frightening. Smith writes that if preachers speak the truth about life and faith with clarity and courage, preaching could be an act of *confession* that heals, confronts, and enlivens.⁸¹ After weeping and confessions, there must be resistance, according to Smith. She thinks that *resistance* is not just our reaction to the evil we experience and participate in, but it is our action to stand against it. It is not an act of standing still and defending ourselves against the evil that surround us, but it is a movement into it, and through it, with speech and presence and action.⁸²

Dangerous Sermons

Frank A. Thomas serves as the Nettie Sweeney and Hugh Th. Miller Professor of Homiletics and is also the director of the PhD program in African American Preaching and Sacred Rhetoric at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, Indiana. He has written books about preaching, what he refers to as, dangerous sermons and I think that his thoughts can contribute to this study since I want to preach about challenging topics. Thomas defines a dangerous sermon as follows: “A dangerous sermon is a sermon based in the preacher’s moral imagination that upends and challenges the dominant moral hierarchy that operates in the church and/or cultural context of the preaching event.”⁸³ In the definition of dangerous sermons Thomas mentions moral imagination. He defines moral imagination as follows: “Moral imagination is the ability of the preacher, intuitive or otherwise, in the midst of the chaotic experiences of human life and existence, to grasp and share God’s abiding wisdom and ethical truth in order to benefit the individual and common humanity.”⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Smith C. M., *Preaching as Weeping, Confession and Resistance: Radical Responses to Radical Evil*, 4.

⁸⁰ Smith C. M., *Preaching as Weeping, Confession and Resistance: Radical Responses to Radical Evil*, 4.

⁸¹ Smith C. M., *Preaching as Weeping, Confession and Resistance: Radical Responses to Radical Evil*, 5.

⁸² Smith C. M., *Preaching as Weeping, Confession and Resistance: Radical Responses to Radical Evil*, 5.

⁸³ Thomas Frank A., *Surviving a Dangerous Sermon*, xvii.

⁸⁴ Thomas F. A., *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon*, 3.

I think the definitions of Prophetic Preaching mentioned earlier is close to Thomas way of reflecting about dangerous sermons. He thinks that we as Christians must react when it comes to misconduct and injustice in the world. The moral imagination of true Christian faith advocates against racism, misogyny, patriarchy, homophobia, discrimination, cynicism, scapegoating, blame, and so on and visions all human beings created in the image of God, and as such, warrants the ritual and benefits of freedom for all.⁸⁵ This is what encourages me to dare to highlight challenging topics while preaching. He even challenges preachers to preach dangerous sermons as he writes: “I want preachers to preach effective and dangerous sermons that upend oppressive moral hierarchy and the moral hierarchies of the audience, the sermon can be crafted in such a way that it has the best chance to be heard, even when the congregation or parts of the congregation disagree with the preacher.”⁸⁶

So, how can a preacher, according to Thomas, preach constructively about difficult issues in a way that makes the listener feel safe enough to hear what is being said? Thomas lists four qualities of the moral imagination that can be useful when the preacher is preparing a so-called dangerous sermon.

1. Envision equality and represent that by one’s physical presence.⁸⁷
2. Use sympathy as a catalyst or bridge to create opportunities to overcome the past and make new decisions for peace and justice.⁸⁸
3. Find wisdom in ancient texts, sources of ancient wisdom and truth, and the wisdom of the ages.⁸⁹
4. The language of poetry and art that lifts and elevates the human spirit by touching the emotive chords of wonder, mystery, and hope.⁹⁰

I will have those qualities in my mind while preparing the coming sermons connected to this preaching project. The result will be presented in chapter six.

⁸⁵ Thomas F. A., *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon*, xl.

⁸⁶ Thomas F. A., *Surviving a Dangerous Sermon*, xxi.

⁸⁷ Thomas F. A., *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon*, 17.

⁸⁸ Thomas F. A., *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon*, 18.

⁸⁹ Thomas F. A., *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon*, 19.

⁹⁰ Thomas F. A., *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon*, 20.

Summary and Reflections

In this chapter, I have presented some homiletic theories about Prophetic Preaching. I have chosen to let this study be based homiletically in the tradition of the prophetic way of preaching because it has experience regarding talking about difficult topics and challenging issues. In using Prophetic Preaching, I believe that there is a possibility of being able to speak so that the listener hears and deeply takes in what is being said even if it can trigger feelings that are painful or demanding.

I have referred to several homileticians but have chosen to focus on Tisdale and Thomas because I think that their practical advice can be both useful and helpful in crafting the sermons connected to this study. I have mentioned the obstacles and strategies for Prophetic Preaching that Tisdale has written about. I have also referred to Thomas's thoughts on dangerous sermons and the qualities of the moral imagination that can be useful when the preacher is preparing a dangerous or prophetic sermon. I sought concrete advice on how to use Prophetic Preaching and still preserve a safe space for the listener even if the sermon revolved around challenging themes and since this study is based on only two sermons, I choose to concentrate on only these two homileticians in order to be able to clearly focus on their thoughts.

In the two sermons connected to this study, I will be aware of the obstacles that may stand in the way of prophetic sermons, mentioned by Tisdale, and through this increased awareness also dare to challenge these obstacles. I will also apply the mentioned strategies in creating a sermon with a movement from the familiar to the unfamiliar, to invite the listener to try to stand in someone else's shoes to provide new perspectives, and to show that as a preacher I stand with the congregation and struggle with the same issues and experience the same difficulties as they do.

My aim is also to try to use the thoughts of Thomas on how to constructively preach about challenging questions in a way that makes the listener comfortable enough to be able to listen. I will incorporate the four qualities of moral imagination, that Thomas mentions, while preparing the sermons. Especially the quality of envisioning equality and represent that by

one's physical presence by preaching without notes, since I believe that the experience of my physical presence will thereby be strengthened as I will be able to keep more eye contact with the listeners and move more freely in the room. I will reflect on the quality of using sympathy as a catalyst or bridge to create opportunities during the sermon to overcome the past and make new decisions for peace and justice. I hope to be able to make this bridge by acknowledging the shared difficulties of being human in a seemingly unjust world without pointers. By using thought provoking themes, I want to highlight that we all struggle with similar difficulties and that they are not primarily personal but human.

Chapter Four

Gestalt Therapy

Introduction

In this chapter I will give a brief introduction to Gestalt Therapy since I have chosen it as a cognate field in this study. I will focus on some important concepts that I think can be useful in this study about creating a safe preaching situation.

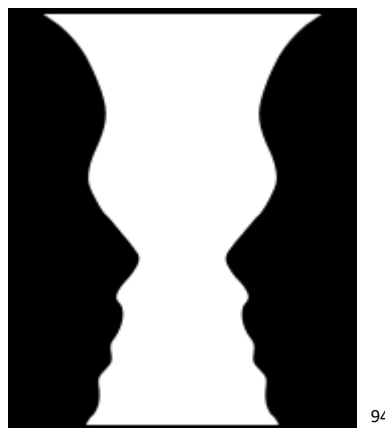
Gestalt Therapy theories deal with topics such as contact, awareness, and how we can influence the way we look at our lives here and now. I perceive that the techniques used within Gestalt Therapy will be useful and assist me in creating a safe preaching situation. The reason for creating a safe preaching situation is to provide a safe space for the listener to be able to attentively listen even if the sermon theme deals with difficult issues. The aim is to assist the listener to stay in what can hurt and dare to explore their own memories to see if there are opportunities to move on from these experiences and to expand understanding and widen perspectives.

My sources for presenting Gestalt Therapy are Fritz Perls, Jorge Rosner and Serge Ginger. Perls is a German American psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, and Gestalt therapist, as well as the main founder of Gestalt Therapy. Rosner is the founder of Gestalt Institute of Toronto, and Ginger is a French clinical psychologist, psychoanalyst, psychodramatist, and Gestalt therapist.

Gestalt Therapy

Gestalt Therapy was developed in the 1950s by Frederick ("Fritz") Perls, Laura Perls and Paul Goodman. It is based on psychoanalysis, Gestalt psychology, existentialism, holism, European philosophy, and Zen Buddhism.⁹¹

The word Gestalt does not have a straightforward equivalent word in English. According to Rosner: "Gestalt is a German Word meaning form, figure, shape, whole perceived against a ground."⁹² Gestalt Therapy is based on a holistic view where body, mind and soul cannot be separated but form a whole.⁹³ When different patterns or figures appear in our lives, they are not due to separate parts of our lives. Both the background and what emerges play a role in the whole. From the whole, different figures emerge. We can only perceive one figure at a time.



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In Betty Dawids image above, you may see a white chalice or two faces in profile, but it is impossible for the eye to perceive both images at the same time. Background and figure change places depending on which image you choose to focus on, but both the background

⁹¹ Rosner J., *Peeling the Onion. Gestalt Theory and Methodology*, 164.

⁹² Rosner J., *Peeling the Onion. Gestalt Theory and Methodology*, 165.

⁹³ Rosner J., *Peeling the Onion. Gestalt Theory and Methodology*, 84.

⁹⁴ Dawids, B., *Drawing from the right side of the Brain*. Accessed December 10, 2021.

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fkreativkonst.wordpress.com%2F2017%2F01%2F16%2FInstruktionsfilm-optisk-illusion%2F&psig=AOvVaw0O - 5frgW70aJIm5PE7sgX&ust=1639213210833000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CAsQjRxqFwoTCKDOv5vv2PQC FQAAAAAdAAAAABAP>

and the foreground are needed for us to perceive an image. Ginger gives another example of how gestalt can change as he writes about the different functions of a table. It can be used for work, all covered with books and papers, or for dining, set with tablecloth, plates, glasses, forks, and knives. Its overall gestalt has changed.⁹⁵

Perls describes that the gestalt, the figure, forms a whole. Even though everything cannot be perceived at the same time, the whole is always at the bottom as a dormant whole.⁹⁶

Different figures appear in our thoughts and consciousness. In most people, the gestalts, the figures that appear are flexible and they change with one figure receding into the background as something else becomes figural. According to Perls, the most important unfinished situations emerge in the conversations and the client gets a chance to deal with them. If we prevent ourselves from achieving this character formation we function poorly and we can carry with us many unfinished situations that always require to be completed.⁹⁷

I recognize that different patterns appear at different times for me in the preaching situation. If I preach in regard to the same Bible text but at different times, the Bible text rarely presents the same pattern during the sermon. What catches my attention in the Bible text the first time may be something completely different the second time. In other words, the same Bible text can appeal to me in very different ways depending on the situation and therefore the sermons also differ a lot even though the Bible text is the same. I believe it is important for the preacher to listen to what the Bible text has to convey each and every time it is used in a new sermon.

To be Here and Now

Perls explains how Gestalt Therapy helps the client to understand the concept of now. He writes: "In Gestalt Therapy, we try to help the client to understand the word "now", the present, the awareness, and discover what is happening in this now."⁹⁸ The focus is on what is experienced in the present and how previous experiences affect our lives now.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Ginger S., *Gestalt Therapy: The Art of Contact*, 1.

⁹⁶ Perls F. S., *Det gestaltterapeutiska arbetssättet*, 140.

⁹⁷ Perls F. S., *Gestaltterapi ord för ord. Föreläsningar, drömseminarier, grupparbete*, 60.

⁹⁸ Perls F. S., *Det gestaltterapeutiska arbetssättet*, 140.

⁹⁹ Rosner J., *Peeling the Onion. Gestalt Theory and Methodology*, 85.

Perls argues that it is not the problems a person once had that are most important to deal with, but the existing problems, here and now, that need to be dealt with. Even if we act as we do because of previous experiences, the focus is on how the life lived here and now should be handled.¹⁰⁰ Our past can make our current life unhappy. It is difficult to be fully involved in the present if our unresolved issues in the past stand in the way of fully living life here and now.¹⁰¹ In therapy, Perls urged his patients not to speak imperfectly about their perceived trauma or problems, but instead to relive their trauma or problems in the form of role-playing or on, the so called, Hot Seat in order to end them in the present.¹⁰²

Ginger writes:

Gestalt develops a *unifying* vision of the human being, which integrates *senses, feelings, thoughts, social relationships, and spirituality*. This paves the way towards a *holistic* experience, where the body can “speak”, and the words can be “seen and felt”. The emphasis is on *becoming aware of what is happening here and now*.¹⁰³

The Gestalt Therapy theory emphasis on being in the present reminds me that preaching is given in a specific place and time. What happens in the preaching situation does not affect what has already happened. Perhaps a sermon can influence how a person sees and interprets what has happened before, but it can only affect how the recipient understands an event now and in the future. I believe that the preacher who, while basing the sermon on old Bible texts, focuses on being fully aware that the address is happening in the here and now can connect with the listener better.

The Questions “Why?” and “How?”

In Gestalt Therapy, one chooses not to ask the question “why”. Perls explains that questions of “why” can generate answers that feel constructed. It can also lead to the client trying to defend himself, to simplify or even apologize rather than allowing for an in-depth exploration of why one reacts the way one does.¹⁰⁴ Perls argues that the question “why”

¹⁰⁰ Perls F. S., *Det gestaltterapeutiska arbetssättet*, 78.

¹⁰¹ Perls F. S., *Det gestaltterapeutiska arbetssättet*, 39.

¹⁰² Perls F. S., *Det gestaltterapeutiska arbetssättet*, 80.

¹⁰³ Ginger S., *Gestalt Therapy: The Art of Contact*, 5.

¹⁰⁴ Perls F. S., *Det gestaltterapeutiska arbetssättet*, 93.

does not mean anything progressive in the healing process, but that questions asked with the help of "how" provides greater opportunities for development. As I understand Perls, he means that questions asked with the help of "how" research the structure of an event and if the structure is made visible, the answers to all questions "why" come by themselves.¹⁰⁵

In the Judeo-Christian context, the question "why" is common. We have a habit of shouting out our "why" to God in prayer and lamentation. In the Psalms, in the Bible, the word "why" is found 22 times. As I see it the difference between Gestalt Therapy and Judeo-Christian faith, when it comes to using the word "why", is that the Judeo-Christian believer has an object, God, to ask his questions to and it is not strange to us that God can give us answers, although the answer rarely comes immediately. God can harbor our "whys" when the life situation is difficult to bear. But I also understand that the way I myself can help solve my own or others' knots is more constructively done by focusing on the question of "how". So, I think that the question "why" has its meaning, but it is important not to get caught up in it without moving on to the question of "how" life can be lived.

Awareness

Awareness is an important key aspect in Gestalt Therapy, which initiates growth and change. Rosner describes awareness as the spontaneous differentiation between what we sense and what we think we see and experience.¹⁰⁶ He mentions three zones of awareness: The Outer Zone, which includes the five senses: seeing, touching, smelling, tasting, and hearing.¹⁰⁷ The Middle Zone includes all thinking process: thinking, planning, imaging, remembering, analysing.¹⁰⁸ The Inner Zone contains feelings, emotions, and body sensations.¹⁰⁹

The Gestalt therapist's role in Gestalt Therapy is to stay aware and be personally involved in the contact with the client. The therapist will show sympathy, share his or her ideas and feelings and interact with the client to create a fundamentally authentic relationship.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Perls F. S., *Det gestaltterapeutiska arbetssättet*, 93.

¹⁰⁶ Rosner J., *Peeling the Onion. Gestalt Theory and Methodology*, 28.

¹⁰⁷ Rosner J., *Peeling the Onion. Gestalt Theory and Methodology*, 28.

¹⁰⁸ Rosner J., *Peeling the Onion. Gestalt Theory and Methodology*, 28.

¹⁰⁹ Rosner J., *Peeling the Onion. Gestalt Theory and Methodology*, 29.

¹¹⁰ Ginger S., *Gestalt Therapy: The Art of Contact*, 16.

Ginger explains that the therapist should be honest about what he or she thinks and says but at the same time the therapist may choose not to say everything he or she thinks.¹¹¹

On Sweden's Authorized Gestalt Therapists' website, they write:

”Mötet mellan terapeut och klient är ett professionellt och mellanmänniskt möte, mellan två personer som delar erfarenheten av att vara människa i världen. *Mötet, kontakten, situationen här och nu, medvetenhet och ansvar är de centrala hörnstenarna.*”¹¹²

I perceive that the Gestalt therapist's approach described above is like the approach I have as a preacher. Just as the therapist is honest in the sharing of thoughts and feelings with the client, so as to provide greater opportunities for development, I share my own experiences, fragility and vulnerability with the listeners so as to create a deeper connection in the sermons.

Contact

Another keyword in Gestalt Therapy is contact. Contact is made possible according to Rosner when we use our senses to perceive our environment, when we in depth meet another person and there is a sense of I as different from others, when we find ourselves in the now and when we let a gestalt appear clearly against a background.¹¹³ Gestalt Therapy works with the contact boundary between the client and his or her environment.¹¹⁴ In areas where the contact is perceived as less, where the therapist finds that there is a resistance to connect, that becomes the field of interest for the therapist and the client to work further with.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Ginger S., *Gestalt Therapy: The Art of Contact*, 16.

¹¹² “Om gestalt terapi” [About Gestalt Therapy], Sveriges auktoriserade gestaltterapeuter [Sweden's Authorized Gestalt Therapists], Accessed October 7, 2021, <http://www.gestaltterapeuterna.se/om-gestaltterapi> The text is only available in Swedish. Here is my one translation: “The meeting between therapist and client is a professional and interpersonal meeting, between two people who share the experience of being a human being in the world. *The meeting, the contact, the situation here and now, awareness and responsibility are the central cornerstones.*”

¹¹³ Rosner J., *Peeling the Onion. Gestalt Theory and Methodology*, 35.

¹¹⁴ Ginger S., *Gestalt Therapy: The Art of Contact*, 129.

¹¹⁵ Ginger S., *Gestalt Therapy: The Art of Contact*, 34-35.

Contact is and has been a key word for me throughout this process with all three preaching projects and essays. For me, contact with my own history, my own encounters with God, and my own vulnerability, is important to convey when I preach in order for me to be honest. Contact with worshippers has become extremely important during delivering the sermons and I feel that contact with the listeners increases if I preach by heart. And for me the contact with God is foundational, without it I have nothing to preach.

Responsibility

Other concepts that Gestalt Therapy works with is responsibility, language of responsibility, and polarities.¹¹⁶ Rosner argues that we can feel fear of facing what is different compared to ourselves. He thinks that through Gestalt Therapy one can learn to take responsibility for what we avoid out of fear and indecision and instead make active choices going forward.¹¹⁷ One way to take responsibility is thorough the language used. There are situations when your language makes it clear that you are not willing to take responsibility or that you are unwilling to include yourself. By being aware of your language you can recognize your own ability to respond. For example, when we change our “I can’t” to “I can” or “I won’t” to “I will” then I can take responsibility for my choices.¹¹⁸

Rosner claims that if we actively opt out the pronoun “I” to “it”, “you”, “one” or “they” then we avoid responsibility and avoid taking our own experiences into account.¹¹⁹ The more active a role you take in responding to your will, wishes, failures and success, the truer to your own experience and feelings you will be, which may have a profound effect on your whole personality.¹²⁰

When I preach, I am careful how I talk about God and about people. Even in this essay, written in English, which is not my native language, I struggle to find neutral words. I do not want to talk about God as “he” or refer to people as either “she” or “he” if I do not know what gender they identify as. I am missing English words that can mean both “she” and “he” and both “her” and “his” at the same time, like the words “en” and “hen” in Swedish. This is

¹¹⁶ Rosner J., *Peeling the Onion. Gestalt Theory and Methodology*, 66.

¹¹⁷ Rosner J., *Peeling the Onion: Gestalt Theory and Methodology*, 66.

¹¹⁸ Rosner J., *Peeling the Onion: Gestalt Theory and Methodology*, 71-72.

¹¹⁹ Rosner J., *Peeling the Onion: Gestalt Theory and Methodology*, 72.

¹²⁰ Rosner J., *Peeling the Onion: Gestalt Theory and Methodology*, 73.

important to me as a preacher because I want to invite a broader image of God than only as a male. I also want the people I speak to or about to be included in the words whether they are women, men or whether they choose to define themselves otherwise.

The Hot Seat

A technique within Gestalt Therapy is the “Hot Seat” or the “empty chair.”¹²¹ Perls often uses the Hot Seat as a means of guiding the individual from self-confrontation to awareness to change.¹²² The client, often in public, sat on the “Hot Seat” near the therapist, facing an empty chair on which he or she would imagine and speak to a particular person or object in its absence.¹²³ As I understand Rosner, the “Hot Seat” is a technique used to increase awareness of how life is lived and perceived by the client. The client practices projecting parts of his psyche on real and/or imagined people sitting on an empty chair. It is a conversation and form of role-play where the client is given the opportunity to gain insight, resolve conflicts or end unfinished events that remain and affect the present.¹²⁴

I am interested if this kind of monodrama where one person plays different roles and where questions and answers are perceived out of an empty chair could be a way to open up for a wider range of experiences also within the preaching situation. My goal is to try to use parts of this technique in at least one of the sermons connected to this study.

Summary

In this chapter, I have briefly described what Gestalt Therapy entails by describing some important concepts and techniques used in Gestalt Therapy. I have tried to explain what the term gestalt means and how different gestalts appear depending on the perspective from which you look at them. I have also described the ideas within Gestalt Therapy about how we experience and respond to our lives in the here and now, as well as, how to allow ourselves to provide greater opportunities for development by not asking the question “why”, but instead asking “how”. I have described the therapist's role in Gestalt Therapy,

¹²¹ Rosner J., *Peeling the Onion: Gestalt Theory and Methodology*, 80.

¹²² Perls F. S., *Gestaltterapi ord för ord. Föreläsningar, drömseminarier, grupparbete*, 82.

¹²³ Ginger S., *Gestalt Therapy: The Art of Contact*, 132.

¹²⁴ Rosner J., *Peeling the Onion: Gestalt Theory and Methodology*, 166.

which involves personal sharing of life and thoughts in an active way, and explained how important awareness is in Gestalt Therapy because it is thought to initiate growth and change. I have also mentioned how important it is, according to Gestalt Therapy, to consciously can take responsibility for how we express ourselves. The technique of the “Hot Seat” or “empty chair” has been explained as an important tool used in Gestalt Therapy to give the client the opportunity to end unfinished relationships or events, resolve conflicts, and open up to new insights. A techniques I want to try to use in at least one of the sermons.

Chapter Five

The Research: The Methodology and Procedure

Introduction

This study has its focus on creating a safe preaching situation. I have previously outlined the context, some homiletical theories about Prophetic Preaching and Gestalt Therapy that I have chosen as cognate field in this study. In this chapter, the methodology and procedure will be presented. To do this study, two sermons are requested that will be recorded during the service so that my Swedish and my American advisor can have the opportunity to see and reflect on them afterwards. In the following, I will reflect on the method of preaching in regard to difficult issues and preaching without notes. I will also describe the Parish Project Group, the methodology and the procedure of preparing, giving the sermons, and the reflections and evaluations that will be made after the sermons are given.

The Parish Project Group

The Parish Project Group was constituted in August 2021. Everyone in the group was asked to participate through an e-mail where I briefly described what the group's task would be.¹²⁵ The members of the Parish Project Group are people who are regular worshipers in Vinslöv's parish. Some of them have already attended Serenity Prayer Mass in Vinslöv or in another

¹²⁵ Appendix I.

parish. I chose people I already knew and who I trusted because I thought they could provide feedback after the sermon had been delivered during the Serenity Prayer Mass. The group consists of seven people, four women and three men between 40 and 85 years old. Four of them already knew each other. Six of them belong to the congregation. One person belongs to the neighboring parish. This person has previously had extensive experience of Serenity Prayer Services in another congregation. There is a strength in the fact that not everyone knew each other in the group before.

Dr. Tim Sensing claims that, when it comes to qualitative research, people who do not know each other become clearer in their message because the unspoken knowledge that exists between friends is missing and the conversation then becomes clearer and easier for the researcher to interpret.¹²⁶

Methodology

The form of preaching I want to try is Prophetic Preaching. The aim is to create a safe space during the Serenity Prayer Mass. The tools I want to use are from Gestalt Therapy and the theological reflections will be based on the theories of the theologian and homelitician Professors Leonora Tubbs Tisdale and Frank A. Thomas, who write about Prophetic Preaching and dangerous sermons. My method is to preach about thought provoking themes and the purpose is to see if the safe space created through the Gestalt Therapy techniques can be maintained even when the subject matter is challenging because it brings up difficult issues. I will also try to preach without notes to increase a sense of connection with the listeners. I will ask the Parish Preaching Group to fill in an opening questionnaire and after the sermons are delivered, I will conduct two group interviews with the Parish Preaching Group as focus group.

Preaching about existentially difficult issues

Since I want to challenge my research on how I can create a safe preaching situation by preaching about existentially difficult issues, I want to briefly define my view of why some issues are existentially difficult.

¹²⁶ Sensing T., *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, 121.

During the second year of the ACTS Doctor of Ministry in Preaching Program, Dr. Charles Campbell came to Uppsala, Sweden, and lectured based on his book *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*.¹²⁷ It is a book that has influenced and clarified my view of what the powers and principalities are and how they affect us. I believe it is those powers that Campbell describes that make the existentially difficult issues in our lives difficult. Therefore, I would like to present some of Campbell's thoughts.

Campbell focuses on the biblical, theological, and ethical dimensions of preaching. His book contains thoughts about how evil is at work in the world.¹²⁸ What are the powers that strengthen the evil in the world?¹²⁹ How can we be more aware of the evil's strategies,¹³⁰ and what did Jesus in the resistance against principalities and powers?¹³¹ Campbell writes about how Jesus exposes the powers, and by exposing them, he disarms them and frees us from their grip.¹³² There are many names of evil in the Bible. When the evil is described, it is aggressive towards all life.¹³³

Campbell writes:

In their fallen state, the powers have thus become relentlessly aggressive against all life, particularly human life in society, the relationship between human beings and the powers has become inverted from God's intention. Rather than serving the ends of human life, the powers now exercise domination over human beings, restricting, controlling, and consuming human powers, in short, have become demonic.¹³⁴

The goal of the powers of evil is to survive and dominate.¹³⁵ To cope with this, tools such as control over others, rankings and hierarchies are used.¹³⁶ The powers' need to survive and domination is expressed through violence.¹³⁷

¹²⁷ Campbell C., *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*.

¹²⁸ Campbell C., *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*, 13-20.

¹²⁹ Campbell C., *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*, 11.

¹³⁰ Campbell C., *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*, 33-43.

¹³¹ Campbell C., *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*, 45-48.

¹³² Campbell C., *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*, 48-67.

¹³³ Campbell C., *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*, 25.

¹³⁴ Campbell C., *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*, 25.

¹³⁵ Campbell C., *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*, 25.

¹³⁶ Campbell C., *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*, 26.

¹³⁷ Campbell C., *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*, 27.

The strategies of the powers are legion.¹³⁸ They are among others negative sanctions, rewards and promises, isolation and division, demoralization, diversion, public rituals, surveillance, language, image, and at last secrecy.¹³⁹

Campbell writes: “When Jesus came preaching peace, he himself used no violence but through his words and his life, death and resurrection he set people free from the powers of death.”¹⁴⁰ One of the tasks of the preacher is to help people see the world through the Christian story,¹⁴¹ to name the power and unveil their reality.¹⁴² Through exposing the powers and use direct speech to name the powers and hold up their activities for people to see we can change something to the better.¹⁴³ To remember our history, we can stand stronger against evil.¹⁴⁴ We can share personal experiences when the powers have been exposed to us through which we have come to see the world with new eyes.¹⁴⁵

Campbell writes:

Sharing such experiences is important for the preacher, not only because they can help expose the powers but because through them the preacher stands with the congregation, implicated in her own complicity with the powers and vulnerably recounting those moments when her vision was changed.¹⁴⁶

But it is not enough exposing the powers, we also must envision how the new creation has broken into the world in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection and will be brought to completion in the fullness of time.¹⁴⁷ Campbell means that “such envisioning seeks to set people free from fear of death and generate hope that empowers new life in and for the world.”¹⁴⁸

¹³⁸ Campbell C., *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*, 33.

¹³⁹ Campbell C., *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*, 33-43.

¹⁴⁰ Campbell C., *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*, 77.

¹⁴¹ Campbell C., *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*, 100.

¹⁴² Campbell C., *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*, 106.

¹⁴³ Campbell C., *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*, 107.

¹⁴⁴ Campbell C., *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*, 110.

¹⁴⁵ Campbell C., *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*, 114.

¹⁴⁶ Campbell C., *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*, 114-115.

¹⁴⁷ Campbell C., *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*, 119.

¹⁴⁸ Campbell C., *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*, 120.

Preaching Without Notes

In my second Preaching Project I chose to preach without notes in order to increase the presence in the church during the sermon.¹⁴⁹ I found out that this was helpful for the worshippers as well.¹⁵⁰ This convinced me to use this as a method again this time.

In his book *Preaching Without Notes* Joseph M. Webb accounts for three basic reasons for why a well-prepared, well-delivered sermon preached without notes makes an exhilarating and frequently memorable experience.¹⁵¹ Webb writes: “The first reason for preaching without notes is because it makes possible the fullest and most intense bonding between the preacher and those who share the preaching.”¹⁵² Preaching without notes create and sustain a strong bond between the one who is speaking and the ones who are listening.¹⁵³ This is something I can recognize while preaching without notes.

Webb states that there are sometimes occasions when something special happens in the room and he describes this as follows:

This reflects the classic power of public speech from its ancient to its most modern forms. Thinking out words carefully and speaking them with naturalness and energy, without visible prompting, can create mental, emotional, even spiritual connections with an audience that no other form of public address can match. It is not easy to describe, let alone explain, this bonding power, and yet anyone who has ever been held spellbound listening to someone speak – as we all have been at some time or another – knows the indescribable magic of that experience.¹⁵⁴

The conclusion can be made that it is the words that matter the most for the listeners in a sermon and they are of course important, but as Webb points out, the most effective public speech is only secondarily about words.¹⁵⁵ He writes: “What they watch for and are most

¹⁴⁹ Wäreborn I., *På spaning efter en trefaldig närvaro; En studie av den upplevda närvaron under predikan*. Project report, Qualified Swedish Preaching Program in Sweden. (Uppsala 2014), 11.

¹⁵⁰ Wäreborn I., *På spaning efter en trefaldig närvaro; En studie av den upplevda närvaron under predikan*. Project report, Qualified Swedish Preaching Program in Sweden. (Uppsala 2014), 15.

¹⁵¹ Webb J. M., *Preaching Without Notes*, 25.

¹⁵² Webb J. M., *Preaching Without Notes*, 25.

¹⁵³ Webb J. M., *Preaching Without Notes*, 25.

¹⁵⁴ Webb J. M., *Preaching Without Notes*, 26.

¹⁵⁵ Webb J. M., *Preaching Without Notes*, 27.

sensitive to are the feelings, the emotions, out of which the words that are spoken arise.”¹⁵⁶ And those feelings and emotions will come out clearer while speaking without notes.¹⁵⁷

The second reason for preaching without notes is to maximize participation. According to Webb, a delivered sermon without notes, by its inductive nature, clearly invites the participation of the congregants.¹⁵⁸

In the book *Predikan växer fram*, Tina Johansson and Maria Ottensten describe what an inductive and a deductive sermon are.¹⁵⁹ The inductive sermon is based on our everyday lives and the issues that are relevant in our lives.¹⁶⁰ It places our own lives in relation to the Gospel that meets us in the biblical texts of the service.¹⁶¹ The inductive sermon does not start with theories, instead it starts with a situation that needs to be interpreted.¹⁶² I understand that the inductive sermon becomes a kind of common walk that both the preacher and the listeners are invited to participate in. Another way of looking at the sermon is the deductive sermon which assumes that there are certain eternal truths and theories that the pastor has access to. Those eternal truths and theories should be transferred and applied in the congregation by the pastor.¹⁶³ This is a more traditional form of preaching that has often been presented as a three-point sermon with an Introduction, Step 1 where the text is commented on, Step 2 where the text is interpreted and analyzed theologically, Step 3 where the text is applied to the congregation and finally a Conclusion that summarizes the sermon.¹⁶⁴ In this preaching project, I choose the form of inductive sermon because I believe that the shared walk through the sermon increases a feeling of connection and security.

The third reason for preaching without notes that Webb mentions is that preaching without notes increases the feeling that the sermon is an authentic place for witnessing and

¹⁵⁶ Webb J. M., *Preaching Without Notes*, 27.

¹⁵⁷ Webb J. M., *Preaching Without Notes*, 28.

¹⁵⁸ Webb J. M., *Preaching Without Notes*, 28.

¹⁵⁹ Johansson T., Ottensten M., *Predikan växer fram*.

¹⁶⁰ Johansson T., Ottensten M., *Predikan växer fram*, 132.

¹⁶¹ Johansson T., Ottensten M., *Predikan växer fram*, 132.

¹⁶² Johansson T., Ottensten M., *Predikan växer fram*, 132.

¹⁶³ Johansson T., Ottensten M., *Predikan växer fram*, 132.

¹⁶⁴ Johansson T., Ottensten M., *Predikan växer fram*, 133.

testifying.¹⁶⁵ The Christian witness will be more moving when the witness appears to those who are listening “from the preacher’s heart.”¹⁶⁶ As Webb writes: “...one will only appear truly believable if one gets rid of the script and the notes and just talks.”¹⁶⁷

Opening Questionnaire and Group interviews

The research methods used are the Questionnaire and the Group Interview. There is an Opening Questionnaire¹⁶⁸ with open-ended questions. Open-ended questions invite responders to write several sentences as an answer to the question.¹⁶⁹

The Opening Questionnaire was answered by the Parish Project Group at the end of our first meeting. The purpose was to gain an understanding of how the group defined safety and how they experienced a safe situation. Two questions were about what they as listeners need to be able to listen to a sermon that is not about a difficult subject and what can stand in the way so that it becomes difficult to listen.¹⁷⁰ At the end of this Questionnaire, I also asked if the participants in the Parish Project Group had any theme they wanted for the sermons.¹⁷¹ I received several suggestions on themes. Both sermons were given themes that were wished by someone in the Parish Project Group.

The discussions after the sermons were designed as Group Interviews where data and insights were gathered for the study.¹⁷² There are both advantages and disadvantages to using the Group Interview form. An advantage is that the synergy of the group provides richer data than individual interviews.¹⁷³ But there is a risk that one person's response may affect another's response or thoughts.¹⁷⁴ The group interview collects a lot of data at

¹⁶⁵ Webb J. M., *Preaching Without Notes*, 29.

¹⁶⁶ Webb J. M., *Preaching Without Notes*, 30.

¹⁶⁷ Webb J. M., *Preaching Without Notes*, 30.

¹⁶⁸ Appendix III.

¹⁶⁹ Sensing, T., *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, 113.

¹⁷⁰ Appendix III.

¹⁷¹ Appendix III.

¹⁷² Sensing, T., *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, 120.

¹⁷³ Sensing, T., *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, 120.

¹⁷⁴ Sensing, T., *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, 120.

once,¹⁷⁵ but the form of the group interview can inhibit the desire to share personal thoughts.¹⁷⁶

It is important that the person conducting the group interview is well prepared for the questions to be asked so that the questions come naturally follow the flow of the conversation.¹⁷⁷ When conducting a group interview, it is also important to know the different personalities in the group. Some may be talkative, tired, shy, angry or sad and it is the responsibility of the moderator to lead the conversation wisely.¹⁷⁸

I believe the advantages of Group Interviews still outweigh the disadvantages and choose Group Interview as the method in this study instead of individual interviews.

The conversations with Lindblom and the Parish Project Group before and after the sermons are written down. They are stored in the author's own archives. The response from the advisors came by e-mail. Those are also kept in the author's private archive.

Procedure

Before the Sermons

In August 2021, I invited various people as members of the Parish Project Group by sending the Letter of Invitation via email.¹⁷⁹ Everyone who was asked did not agree to participate, but in the end, seven people had agreed. Our first meeting was on August 18 where I told them about what the sermon project was about, what I had written about in the previous preaching projects, and what it means to be a Parish Project Group in this context. The members signed The Consent Form¹⁸⁰ and filled in an opening questionnaire where they had to answer questions about what security means to them, what can help them listen with

¹⁷⁵ Sensing, T., *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, 120.

¹⁷⁶ Sensing, T., *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, 120.

¹⁷⁷ Sensing, T., *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, 121.

¹⁷⁸ Sensing, T., *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, 121-123.

¹⁷⁹ Appendix I.

¹⁸⁰ Appendix II.

concentration to a sermon and what can stop them from listening.¹⁸¹ They also had the possibility to wish for themes for the upcoming sermons.

In August 2021, I also contacted Petra Lindblom, the drama teacher and Gestalt therapist with whom I collaborated in my second preaching project to see if she had the opportunity to be involved in my third and final preaching project. She agreed to join.

The plan was that I would meet the Parish Project Group before the services that were part of the preaching project where we talked about the chosen theme for the sermon and the chosen Bible text that the sermon would be based on.

I would also meet Lindblom twice before each sermon was to be given. The first meeting we talked about the theme and the Bible text from the gestalt therapeutic perspective as a preparation for my sermon writing. The second meeting we had was just one or two days before the sermon was to be held. On this occasion we met in the church of Vinslöv where the service would later take place and I gave the sermon for only Lindblom. This meeting aimed to reflect on how the sermon could be held in a way that created a sense of security so that the sermon would be a safe situation for the listeners even though difficult issues would be brought up.

The Sermons

The sermons were held during two occasions of the Serenity Prayer Mass in Vinslövs Church, which took place on Thursday evenings 16 September and 28 October. Since those services were not the regular worship services on Sundays, I did not have to choose the prescribed Bible texts from the Lectionary for the Church of Sweden, so I could choose Bible texts that fit the chosen theme. The sermons were held in Swedish, and they were filmed so that they could later be sent to my advisors.

¹⁸¹ Appendix III.

At the time of Sermon One everyone in Parish Project Group were able to attend but when it was time for Sermon Two then one member of the Parish Project Group was prevented from participating.

After the Sermons

The day after Sermon One was held, the Parish Project Group met in the Church House where I had a group interview¹⁸² with the Parish Project Group as focus group. I wrote notes during the interview. After I had left the meeting, the meeting was summed up by the Parish Project Group in a Sermon Response Form.

Immediately after Sermon Two, the Parish Project Group met again at the Church House. This time too I had a group interview with them in the same way as after Sermon One. It was the same questions as last time, except for the last question, which had a different content.¹⁸³

Sermon One

The theme in Sermon One was bullying. This theme was wished for in the Opening Questionnaire by a member in the Parish Preaching group.¹⁸⁴ On Sunday services we have to follow the Lectionary for the Church of Sweden, but the Serenity Prayer Mass is celebrated Thursday evenings and that gives me the possibility to choose the text I think correspond well to the theme and I chose to preach on John 4: 4-29, about Jesus and the Samaritan woman.¹⁸⁵

Preparations

Preparations together with Petra Lindblom, the Gestalt Therapy therapist

I met Petra Lindblom in her garden, and I read the Bible text aloud to her. I told her that the sermon would revolve around bullying. After having heard the Bible text and the theme of

¹⁸² Appendix V.

¹⁸³ Appendix VII.

¹⁸⁴ Appendix III.

¹⁸⁵ Appendix IV.

the Serenity Prayer Mass Petra Lindblom immediately suggested a TED conversation with Brene Brown, The Power of Vulnerability.¹⁸⁶ In this talk Brown claims that what creates human relationships is vulnerability. Lindblom also suggested a movie with Brene Brown on Netflix called The Call to Courage. Our conversation revolved around the concepts of vulnerability and courage and Lindblom stated that according to her “what creates real relationships is vulnerability and what create real contact is the courage to reach out to the other first. Vulnerability and courage go hand in hand.”¹⁸⁷

Since this project is about creating a safe preaching space, we discussed what safety is and how the safe preaching space can be made. Lindblom said: “Safety is made if you as a preacher dare to be vulnerable. Courage is not always to succeed; it is to get into the arena and dare to expose yourself. You often fail, sometimes it goes well.”

We were also talking about bullying. We talked about memories of bullying and how those memories can hurt for a long time, sometimes for a lifetime and she asked me if I ever had been bullied. I told her about an occasion when I was a child and other children had thrown snow, lots of snow on me and I did not understand why. I told her that I am still wondering what happened. I am not finished with this incident in my life.

Lindblom also said:

To get out of the debilitating power of bullying, we need to express ourselves, name the feelings we carry with us. If you are or have been bullied, you need to be seen and heard. You think you are bad. To be free from the pain, you need to let it come out. You need to understand that there is a pain. You need to find someone who listens and who has empathy. You need to let the anger take place, only then you can come to an end.

We also talked about faith. Faith helps us to find safety within. It means that we do not feel so vulnerable. Lindblom told me that in Gestalt Therapy, faith is mentioned as a form of self-support.

¹⁸⁶ Brene Brown, TED-talk, The Power of Vulnerability. Accessed September 13, 2021.
https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_the_power_of_vulnerability?language=sv

¹⁸⁷ The conversations with Lindblom and the Parish Project Group are written down. They are stored in the author's private archive.

After this conversation I felt that the following components may be important for the ability to create a safe preaching space while bringing up the difficult topic of bullying:

- The courage to share vulnerability.
- Knowledge about how bullying works inside.
- Set aside time during the sermon so that those who listen feel seen.
- Share faith.

Preparations together with the Parish Project Group

I started reading the whole Bible text to the Parish Project Group. It is a long text. In the Swedish Lectionary this text is divided into two following Sundays. I asked the Parish Preaching Group if there were any words that they noticed a little extra in the text. A man said the word *seeing* made him hear an acceptance and an openness in the conversation between Jesus and the woman. Someone else had heard a strength inside the woman who dared to ask open-ended and concrete questions. She said that the Samaritan women had had her thorns, but her self-esteem remained intact somewhere. Someone else had noticed the Living Water. He associated the word with mental strength, power, and thirst quencher. Someone said that in the meeting between Jesus and the woman there was no reproach, no appreciation. Jesus and the woman were good to each other, he said.

When we started to talk about bullying someone said that bullying feels like carrying a feeling of being worthless. He also said that the experience of being bullied can remain for a very long time. One word can have big consequences in a person's life.

I told the Parish Project Group the same incident as I told Petra Lindblom because I wanted to share vulnerability in order to see if my story would make it easier for someone else to tell a story of their own. A woman in the group then told a story from her childhood and a man shared an experience at his work. It was very nice to see that we were able to talk openly and carefully about memories and thoughts about bullying.

We ended with the same word we started with: To be seen. Something happens when we really see each other. When we look and listen honest and carefully at each other's painful stories, shared with vulnerability and courage, some of the pain can be released.

The Course learnings on which Sermon One is based

The core of the summer residency had the title *Preaching as Social Transformation* and was led by Prof. Jan Schnell. The texts I have taken with me from the core and used in the preparations for Sermon One are, the book *Fear + Less Dialogues: A New Movement for Justice* by Prof. Gregory C. Ellison II,¹⁸⁸ and the chapter, *The Bully and the Pulpit*, from the book *On the Other Side of Freedom: The Case of Hope*, by DeRay Mckesson.¹⁸⁹

Gregory C. Ellison II writes about the concept of *plopping*. The author writes that *plopping* occurs when someone says something in a group but does not get any response to what is said. Not even an acknowledgment that something was said.¹⁹⁰ It is an event that many of us can recognize ourselves in and that I wanted to highlight in the sermon by talking about the worker who is not greeted or even seen when he returned to work after the holidays. I think that the pain caused by plopping lies in not being seen. It is a subtle way of bullying someone since it strongly influences the one who is not seen.

DeRay Mckesson, writes about when he as a child had to start in a new school and how there was a bully along the way to school who created fear whether the bully was present or not when he passed the place where the bully used to be.¹⁹¹ This is a story that can be varied in many ways and which I included in the sermon as one of several examples of situations when someone was bullied. The very idea that the bully's message is heard regardless of whether the bully is present or not became an eye opener for me. It tells us how the message is etched within us, and we can carry on the experience of bullying for long periods of our lives. It affects our self-image; it prevents us from being fully who we are at heart.

¹⁸⁸ Gregory C. Ellison II, *Fear+Less Dialogues: A New Movement for Justice*.

¹⁸⁹ DeRay Mckesson, *On the Other Side of the Freedom*.

¹⁹⁰ Gregory C. Ellison II, *Fear+Less Dialogues: A New Movement for Justice*, p. 68.

¹⁹¹ DeRay Mckesson, *On the Other Side of the Freedom*, p. 71-75.

Sermon practice in Vinslöf's Church together with Petra Lindblom

I met Petra Lindblom in Vinslöf's Church two days before the sermon was to be held in the Serenity Prayer Mass. The sermon was already written, and I held it for Lindblom in an otherwise empty church. First, I gave the whole sermon and shaped it with movements that I had devised. I preached without notes. Afterwards, we talked about how I could calm the tempo down so that the listeners would have time to both see, hear, and reflect. Lindblom reminded me: "There will be both positive and negative reactions among the listeners during the sermon and that those reactions need time to land in what is said and to be embodied during the sermon."

When I talked about the girl who got snow thrown at her, I huddled together. Lindblom wanted all my movements to be more distinct so that I could let my body language speak clearly. Lindblom urged me not to speak while I was moving because then the body language is so much more in focus. Therefore, I tried to curl up and stay that way for a while before I spoke. In the same way, before I talked about how the girl gets up from the snow pile and brushes off the snow, Lindblom suggested that: "It will be stronger and clearer if I first get up from the previously huddled position and then get up and brush my arms from fictitious snow before I speak again."

When I talked about the child who was told at an early school age that she could not draw, Petra encouraged me to add the words sing and express herself so that more people could recognize themselves in that story.

We discussed what was the important message I was trying to convey during this sermon, and I concluded that the sermon is about being seen and about God who sees us. Therefore, I wanted to give the audience the experience of being seen during the sermon. Lindblom pointed out that there will be people in the church who are easy to look at and others who are difficult. She asked me to pay attention to what is happening inside me when I look at the different people sitting in the church. And, she said that that awareness would help me to be present during the sermon.

Towards the end of the sermon, I say: “The eyes of love look at you, help you untie old knots, lead you on new paths and you can be who you are.” Lindblom encouraged me to say instead: “The eyes of love look at you and at me...”. She meant that if I only say *you*, I create a distance, but if I also include myself, the words become more inclusive. They apply to everyone. That I included myself was important, because it is what I carry with me that makes the story essential and credible. If I show that I speak from my own experience, it will be easier to both absorb what I say and to believe what I say.

Lindblom encouraged me to be more vulnerable while singing the concluding song and thereby get more contact with the listeners. I would look upon the song as a gift to those who listened. In Gestalt Therapy, it is said that nothing is more healing than contact. Finally, Lindblom concluded: “The woman gets contact with Jesus at the well of Sychar because he vulnerably asks for help getting water from the well. When I show vulnerability, when I tell my story and sing my song, I create a basis for contact with those who listen.”

Sermon Purpose Statement

The SPS was worded as follows:

In times of increasingly harsh language and judgment in our society and where many of us have experienced various forms of bullying, I want listeners to experience that it is possible to let go of difficult memories or situations, by means of a safe space created by being present and by way of sharing vulnerability through the telling of the story of John 4: 4-29. This to show how God looks at us through the eyes of love and shows us ways out of memories and situations that prevent us from being who God created us to be.

Feedback and reflections

The sermon was received well in the congregation. I felt an awareness from the listeners. It was very calm, very quiet in the church. Several told me afterwards that they had recognized the sermon in their own life. Some of the listeners told me that they had cried during the sermon, and they expressed gratitude for this.

Before the service I was a bit nervous. The theme had become very personal to me as I shared some personal experiences in the sermon. Before the service I told two people that I was nervous, and it felt good to share this feeling. This was also a way to share my vulnerability in connection to the sermon where vulnerability was a tool to establish a connection with the listeners.

I chose to introduce the Bible text by saying that it is a long text from the Scripture. This was a way to get the listeners to feel safe by way of letting them know and thereby be prepared for the length of the text in advance.

The Response of the Parish Preaching Group

In the evaluation of the sermon process, I conducted a group interview with the Parish Project Group as focus group. Several in the group mentioned words such as security, trust and that it was easy to follow the sermon. The Parish Project Group filled in a sermon response form after the group interview.

They wrote: “The preacher’s empathy and presence were answered by the silence and participation of the congregation. In the group interview, several mentioned that they had felt trust and safety during the sermon.”

In the group interview one person was concerned about the way of preaching used during the Serenity Prayer Mass and asked if the movements and more drama than usual would be the consistent way we would preach in the church in the future. We talked about the context and how the context can affect how the address is in the sermon. The expression can differ a lot depending on the form of worship that is celebrated, and which place and time the worship takes place. The same person also defined preaching as something that should primarily stimulate thought and intellect. I think this comment is stimulating since we can define the sermon in many ways. Is the sermon primarily an intellectual exercise for our thoughts or is it also aimed at our deeper layers of experiences, memories, and emotions? The responses from the group interview will be presented further in chapter six.

In the sermon, I used a chair that was placed next to the baptismal font. The baptismal font was allowed to symbolize Sychar's well and using a chair was inspired by the Gestalt Therapy's "Hot seat" technique. Speaking from the woman's perspective, I was standing next to the chair. Speaking from Jesus' perspective, I was sitting on the chair. This was a way of depicting the meeting at the well between Jesus and the woman.

The Response of the Swedish advisor Dr. Niclas Blåder

Dr. Niclas Blåder writes, after he has seen the filming of the sermon, that he sees a calm person standing in the middle of the floor without a script in hand. He noticed that everything in the room was very quiet, that it was my person that occupies the room.

He wrote:

"You move in the room in a pre-conceived way. Everything is stylized, beautiful, trustworthy and calm. As I understand it, nothing happens by chance, you know which direction to turn when, and you raise your hands or make other movements according to a pre-conceived schedule. Your expression grips me."¹⁹²

He noticed that I preached without notes and that this was necessary to be able to give this sermon since it requires an address and not a reading. He also thinks that the message in the sermon is important and recognizable for many in the congregation. He wrote:

You want to create security and create a bubble of peace and quiet where you dare to be yourself. And I, as a listener, am positively affected by this. Your chosen stories are ones that you can recognize yourself in, some as one character, others as the one who exposes others to bullying or something else. Many probably have experience of both. For me, it works anyway. I notice that my thoughts start to slide away in the way I think you want, but without letting go of listening and concentrating on what is to come next.

A reaction from Blåder is the length of the sermon, it is 14 minutes. In most congregations of the Swedish Church this is an unusual long sermon. He suggests to me to consider what would happen if the sermon was one third shorter in length, since he and probably more listeners lose concentration after 8-10 minutes. He writes that I maybe could have skipped the last third of the sermon or at least ended it faster. He thinks that the stories about bullying and the story about the woman and Jesus at the well works very well and addresses

¹⁹² The e-mails from the advisors are stored in the author's private archive.

the listeners concretely, but the last part of the sermon is not necessary. He writes: “The last part risks becoming beautiful words, but words that may not really say much. Maybe I can describe it as working as a poem. It’s quiet, calm, beautiful but it does not feel the same as the rest of the sermon. Somehow it drowns in its own piety.” He suggests that I could have stopped after the dramatized story of Jesus and the woman and let the listeners draw their own conclusions.

The Response of the American advisor Dr. Kimberly Wagner

In her response to Sermon One, Wagner calls for greater clarity whether the illustrations in the sermon are imagined or grounded in real experience. She thinks the strongest sermons are those that are grounded in real life. Wagner comments the fact that I move back and forth between the first and third person in the story about the girl who gets a lot of snow and ice thrown at her.

Wagner also asks for clarity when I am engaging my own imagination versus when I am retelling parts from the Bible. She asks me in her response to support my theological and narrative claims in the sermon by referring more to the text.

The only time I have got any response after the sermon was delivered about the sung part in Sermon One is from Wagner, who responded positively. She reflects about the end of the sermon and writes: “I want to invite you to think about how to finish the sermon more concretely in the life of your community.”

My own Reflections

I found it difficult to write this sermon because the theme touches me personally and triggers my own memories. After the preparatory conversation with Lindblom, I wanted to dare to share my own vulnerability in the sermon in order to get closer in touch with the listeners. Therefore, I chose to talk about my personal experiences of bullying in the sermon. I also wanted to somehow use the technique of the “empty chair” in the sermon as I put Jesus in the “empty chair” next to the well (the baptismal font). It became a kind of a game with symbols. On the altar I also attached a drawing of an eye because the conversation in

Parish Project Group was very much about the Seeing God and how Jesus saw the woman who came to Sychar's well.

I already experienced in the conversation with the Parish Preaching Group that shared vulnerability opens up. After I told the group about my personal experience of bullying, several others shared their stories. I hope this happened in a similar way during the sermon, not that the listeners shared their experiences of bullying through talking, but that they dared to come into contact with those memories in their thoughts during and after the sermon. I felt that the contact with the audience increased because I preached by heart. I had time to see everyone and meet their eyes. I also speak more slowly when I preach by heart because I need time to think. I think it makes it easier for listeners to follow what I say. It gives time for the words to land.

Several in the Parish Preaching Group appreciated that I did not stand still and speak during the sermon but reinforced the words with movements. One person in the group instead expressed concern that the sermons would continue to be so theatrical in the congregation in the future. I will have this concern in my mind while preparing next sermons and evaluate in what context such expressions are of use and where they are not.

Blåder's thoughts on the length of the sermon are interesting. I have not reflected before that the length of the sermon is contextual. I experience sermons in Sweden are generally much shorter than in the USA, which I now relate to because my participation in the ACTS Doctor of Ministry in Preaching Program is linked to the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. Normally my sermons are about 10 – 12 minutes. I will bring his thoughts with me to next sermon.

Wagner's call for clarity regarding using both imagination and real experiences and when to use my imagination while retelling the biblical story is of great interest. I think we may have slightly different inputs when it comes to the form and function of preaching. I see the function of preaching more as an initiator of the worshiper's own thoughts and feelings rather than teaching. Therefore, I also consciously glide between imagination and real experiences, between imagination and retelling of the biblical text, between first and third

person. I think that the listeners just before the sermon started heard the Bible text and therefore themselves can sort out what is fantasy and what is textual. Wagner's reflections challenge me to think about whether I preach too vaguely and whether the lack of clarity in what is fantasy and what is reality affects the worshipers' experience of security during the preaching situation.

Several of the different stories about bullying situations in Sermon One are taken from my own experience, but I think that many of those who were in the church also share these stories with certain variations. The stories are personal, but also universal. Therefore, I chose to mix first and third person in the story about the girl who got snow and ice thrown on her. I wanted to show that I have experienced this in order to open the door to my own vulnerability, without wanting to make anyone feel sorry for me. I tried, after the preparatory conversation with Lindblom, to show vulnerability though telling them that this story was about me in order to connect with the listeners but also to open up paths for the listeners to touch their own vulnerability, their own memories of similar situations.

The fact that Wagner is the only one who have mentioned the singing part in the sermon surprises me a bit. In the Swedish context this is very unusual. Maybe the Swedish listeners felt a little uncomfortable with the song because they were not used to it. I wish I had raised this topic during the group interview, but I did not. Maybe, this was an avoidance on my part since I felt uncomfortable being reviewed in something as personal as my singing.

The ending of the sermon is interesting. Lindblom wanted the ending of the sermon to be less clear, to make an open ending where the listeners could fill in the continuation by them self. Blåder asked for less beautiful words and piety. Warner calls me to finish the sermon more concretely in the life of the community. I want to invite the listener to dare to explore painful memories and find ways forward. I want to give a feeling that the sermon is not over when I stop speaking. What I have said during the sermon is just the beginning of a personal process that can continue individually for a long time. I think all requests for the ending are good and that all of them can serve to make the preaching situation feel safe in different ways. After Sermon One I have a lot of thoughts and reflections to bring with me into

Sermon Two. I will specially carry with me the thoughts of clarity and the ending of the sermon.

Sermon Two

The theme of the Sermon Two is that which is considered foreign. This theme was also wished for by a member in the Parish Preaching Group in the Opening Questionnaire.¹⁹³ In regard to this theme I chose to preach on Luke 4:16-30 when Jesus comes to the synagogue in Nazareth.¹⁹⁴

Preparations

Preparations together with Petra Lindblom, the Gestalt Therapy therapist

I met Lindblom in my home, and she asked me what felt foreign to me. The question was about finding my opposites, that which I absolutely do not consider myself to be, and the way of being that I do not understand. It was challenging and difficult to answer her question. We also talked about how difficult it is to integrate someone you do not understand and that we so easily judge the other. Lindblom said that when we judge we create distance to the other, but also within ourselves because by judging others I cannot accept similar behaviours in myself. She referred to Jung's thoughts on the Shadow Side. She said: "If I feel my own Shadow Side, it will be harder to judge others. If we judge the strange, we remove a part of ourselves because the bad I see in someone else is in me as well. By being aware of my own bad sides, I can create more contact and be more inclusive."

We talked about how we, when we judge someone, we become dangerous. Maybe we judge others because we have previously been judged ourselves. If we are aware of our petty sides, if we can acknowledge our jealousy, then we can face the other. But if we do not acknowledge our shadowy sides, we can become dangerously false.

¹⁹³ Appendix III.

¹⁹⁴ Appendix VI.

Lindblom said: "What stands in the way of the foreign is fear. The opposite of love. It is good for everyone to analyse what is foreign to our self. Then we also understand our fears and can work with them."

We did also relate to Buber's thoughts on "I and Thou."¹⁹⁵ As soon as we feel better than the other, we have lost "I and Thou". Then the other becomes "it" - an object. The person is not then like me but like a strange it.¹⁹⁶ We talked about how lonely Jesus becomes in the text about when he comes to his home village where he has grown up and to the synagogue where he has known most people since childhood. He becomes more alone there than anywhere else. We talked about the expectation that turned to anger when someone who is looked upon as a leader shows sympathy with someone else, maybe even the enemy or someone we dislike. We are often petty, stingy, have a scapegoat mind-set. It is human to build fences. In raising children, boundaries are vital for the child to feel secure. It is human to create "an us and a them". We may even need it to keep up. But those who are outside the border are no less worthy than those who are inside. Jesus sets boundaries but is boundless in his love.

We talked about how the people suddenly turned to Jesus and how people get provoked by someone who has bigger thoughts. You can compare the speed with the quick anger that arises when some famous person or politician does something wrong. A media drive starts. A scapegoat is created. Lindblom said that it can generate a good feeling having a scapegoat to direct your frustration at. Then our own anxiety releases.

We also discussed how the perspective seems to change in the biblical text. Perhaps it was the case that the Jews who were waiting for the Messiah thought that it was them who were the poor, the captive, and the oppressed that Isaiah was talking about in his prophecy. But then Jesus says that it is others who are all this. Others, who are outside the Jewish group. They had to rephrase their own role in the prophecy, only the blindness remained with them. Lindblom said that when we get caught up in a victim role, life becomes unbearable. It becomes a lock that stands in the way of the great love.

¹⁹⁵ Buber, M., *Jag och du*.

¹⁹⁶ Buber, M., *Jag och du*, 91.

Preparations together with the Parish Project Group

In the conversation with the Parish Project Group, we talked about what was completely foreign to ourselves. Someone replied that for her it was completely foreign to be at sea or in space. Another mentioned that she experienced so much alienation in the daily news. Things she never thought would happen she hears about daily now.

We talked about how ignorance arouses fear in us and that we have a choice when we encounter something that is perceived as foreign. We can either become afraid and insecure about the foreign, or we can be curious about it and get to know more about it. As in the meeting with immigrants. Do we become insecure and scared or do we become curious and interested?

We talked about the fear and wrath of the people who chased Jesus to the edge. One person in the group said that the people in the village were not necessarily bad, but maybe they were disappointed because the image of the Messiah did not match what they had imagined. Could he not have been a little smoother, said one in Parish Project Group.

We talked about what really happened when Jesus turns around and walks straight back through the crowd. Someone in the group said that the strength of Jesus, as he walked through the crowd, was inside. He did not have to perform any miracles in Nazareth. The fact that he could turn around and walk away without falling from the precipice was a miracle in itself. Someone asked: What are we chasing all the way to the cliff? What makes us as angry and ruthless as the people of Nazareth became when they heard Jesus speak in the synagogue.

It is a quick and brutal turn in the text from the people praising Jesus to wanting to overthrow him. One person in the group said that Jesus thought bigger than the others. Was that what made him so threatening to the people? One person said that it might be that they were disappointed. Out of disappointment, much evil can come. In case of horrible disappointment, you do not think kind thoughts. There may be aggressions within you that

you did not think you had yourself. You can be dangerous both to yourself and others, she said. Maybe this is what happened, the group concluded the conversation.

The Course learnings on which Sermon Two is based

This summer I chose *Preaching and the Problem of Evil* with Professor Gerald C. Liu as my elective course. When we were preparing our sermons to be given during the summer week, we talked a lot about what it does to the listener when dealing with difficult topics in the sermon. During these conversations, my willingness to explore how I can create a safe preaching situation in the sermon increased. Nolen Gertz book *Nihilism*,¹⁹⁷ and Jerome F. D. Creech's book *Violence in Scriptures*,¹⁹⁸ was course literature.

According to Gertz nihilism can be looked upon as an ideology of nothing.¹⁹⁹

Nolen writes:

According to Socrates, we are like prisoners in an underground cave, not only because we accept as reality whatever we have grown accustomed to but also because, having grown accustomed to this reality, we would reject any challenge to this reality that was presented us.²⁰⁰

Nolan continues further in his book:

From the Socratic perspective, nihilism is a danger both epistemologically and existentially, for Socrates argues that the prisoners would not only continue to believe in shadows even in counterevidence was presented to them but would kill anyone who brought them this counterevidence, anyone who tried to convince them that their believes were false, anyone who tried to liberate them from the prison.²⁰¹

I think this is comparable to what happened in the synagogue in Nazareth when Jesus comes and says that the God of Israel helps strangers, they did not belong to the people. Those who were outside Socrates' imaginary cave. People became dangerous. They drove Jesus out of the synagogue and wanted to kill him by pushing him down the precipice. I think it can also be comparable to our own time as the polarization between peoples and groups increases.

¹⁹⁷ Gertz N., *Nihilism*

¹⁹⁸ Creech J.F.D., *Violence in Scripture*.

¹⁹⁹ Gertz N., *Nihilism*, 6.

²⁰⁰ Gertz N., *Nihilism*, 15.

²⁰¹ Gertz N., *Nihilism*, 15.

Nationalism is strengthened in the world, so also in Sweden. Right-wing populist parties driven by an exclusionary nationalism, opposition to immigration and to establishment are increasing. There are thus tendencies in our country to want to remain in the national cave. There is a risk that there will be aggressive reactions against the one who points to the equal value of all and that the stranger as well as the domestic one is equally loved by God. Nihilism leads to thoughts that nothing is something, nor do we need to care about anyone or anything. Gertz paints a picture of a future where the nihilistic society is apathetic and even though we know of injustices, we feel no responsibility for them.²⁰²

In this sermon, I want to paint a vision that God's transforming love can, after all, change our society and our view of each other. I want to show an acceptance both for our own difficulties in loving beyond what we know and for those who we experience as foreign and who we have difficulty understanding. Barbara Brown Taylor teaches at Piedmont Collage in northeast Georgia and is an adjunct Professor of Spirituality at Colombia Theological Seminary in Decatur. She has written the book *An Altar in the World*,²⁰³ which has been a well of inspiration for my faith. She mentions that in the Hebrew Bible it says 36 times that we should love the stranger, but only once that we should love our neighbour as ourselves. God wants us to love the stranger because the people of Israel and ourselves have the experience of being strangers and because the stranger shows us God like the three strangers who came to Abraham and Sarah, or when Jacob wrestles with a stranger by the river of Jabbok. She also said that God loves the stranger. That is why we should do it too.²⁰⁴

Jerome F. D. Creech writes about the difficult content of Psalm 137.²⁰⁵ There are strong emotions and violent thoughts that we defend ourselves against. Psalm 137, verse 9 contains one of the most problematic passages in the Bible,²⁰⁶ and which the Church prefers to ignore.²⁰⁷ But Creech writes about our need to acknowledge his strong feelings of anger

²⁰² Gertz N., *Nihilism*, 165.

²⁰³ Brown Taylor, B., *An Altar in the World*.

²⁰⁴ Brown Taylor, B., *An Altar in the World*, 97.

²⁰⁵ Creech J.F.D., *Violence in Scripture*, 201.

²⁰⁶ Creech J.F.D., *Violence in Scripture*, 203.

²⁰⁷ Creech J.F.D., *Violence in Scripture*, 204.

and revenge.²⁰⁸ When we put into words the difficult feelings then we are led away from the acts of violence, and it creates opportunities for forgiveness and reconciliation.²⁰⁹

In the sermon, I talked about how we can be provoked by the message that God's love reaches out to everyone, even those we do not want to, those who we fear, those who we look upon as our enemies. I will admit that I can be provoked, that we can probably all be when it goes so far that we have a hard time accepting other people's actions. Through this I want to put into words the feelings of anger and disappointment that I and we all can feel and then be able to turn to God to understand God's real message to us: The message that we all are loved for who we are, not always for what we do, but because we are created by God.

Sermon practice in Vinslöv Church together with Petra Lindblom

Two days before the sermon was to be held in the Serenity Prayer Mass, I preached again to only Lindblom in Vinslöv Church. This time I wanted to move less in the room and let the words speak and Lindblom agreed that it was a good idea. She urged me to speak more slowly, especially when I read the Bible text because it is so rich in content and difficult to keep up with if you hear it for the first time. Lindblom felt that I as a preacher understood the Bible text and that it was therefore easy for her to understand what I was saying. Through the perspective of Gestalt Therapy, Lindblom heard how both the biblical text and the sermon dealt with the topic of self-pity. She said:

It is a danger if you feel sorry for yourself and make yourself a victim. Jesus said: Heal yourself! The greatest cure for our own self-pity is when those who listen both in the synagogue in Nazareth and in the church in Vinslöv, understand that God helps others, then they are cured from feeling sorry for themselves and wanting for themselves. Gestalt Therapy is to ask questions about how we move forward instead of accepting and getting stuck in what is.

²⁰⁸ Creach J.F.D., *Violence in Scripture*, 210.

²⁰⁹ Creach J.F.D., *Violence in Scripture*, 210.

Sermon Purpose Statement

The SPS was worded as follows: *In view of the growing mistrust in society between the familiar and the foreign, I want the listeners to experience how God's love extends beyond our own borders by means of conveying how Jesus shows the people in the synagogue in Nazareth that God helps those who are outside their own group, even those who are foreign to us and whom we do not understand, through a sermon based on Luke 4: 16-30.*

Feedback and reflections

This evening a group of 28 confirmands and their leaders came to join the Serenity Prayer Mass. This service was obligatory for the confirmands and only a few of them had attended a Serenity Prayer Mass before. Most of the other worshipers were middle-aged or older. Everyone in the older group were regular worshipers that I know. All in all, we were 55 people in the church. Almost all the confirmands sat in the southern part of the church and the others sat on the other side, in the north part.

When I welcomed everyone before the service began, I told them that I felt nervous, that my heart was pounding inside. The sermon was well received. I felt that everyone was listening and there was peace in the church. But inside me it was not the same calm.

I was not prepared for the group of confirmands to participate in the service and the fact that the worshipers were so clearly physically divided in the church affected me. When I looked at those who sat in the northern part, I recognized myself in the situation. They calmed me down. But when I looked at the young people seated in the south part of the church, I had a hard time concentrating on preaching because I started thinking about them instead. Questions and thoughts like: *How do they experience this?* Or: *He looks tired.* Or: *How is she?* appeared within me as I delivered my sermon.

I was preaching by heart again this time, but I had a hard time experiencing a flow. I had to search in my memory every time a new sentence was to be started and at one point I realized that I would not remember what was to be said next so I had to look in my folder

with the written sermon that was on the altar and then I could continue preaching by heart. Admittedly, this does not matter. But it was clear that the unexpected and different composition of worshipers affected me. Maybe because the young people felt foreign in the church room. Maybe because they were foreign to me since I do not know them. Either way the situation with the divided room filled with both the familiar and the foreign highlighted the theme of foreign for me as the preacher.

The Response of the Parish Preaching Group

I met the Parish Preaching Group immediately after the Serenity Prayer Mass was finished and I conducted a group interview with them just like the previous time.²¹⁰ From the interview with them, I understand that I was not perceived as nervous or unfocused. They had not noticed that I had had a hard time remembering the sermon.

Several participants in the group mentioned that it felt good and easy to listen when the sermon was situated in their immediate environment, in Vinslöv and in the neighbouring village of Önnestad. One person said that because the context of the sermon was in his everyday life, he could more easily interpret it into his own life.

Some mentioned the confirmands. One person said: “They behaved so well. It was good that they were there, but still they disturbed my concentration. I want to sit in my bubble during a Serenity Prayer Mass. I have a need to let it be my journey these evenings.”

This time my final question in the group interview was: Now that you have participated in two services in the preaching project, what thoughts have been raised in you regarding how the preacher can contribute to creating as safe a preaching situation as possible?

The Parish Preaching Group gave me several suggestions about how and what I as a preacher can think and do to create a safe preaching situation. An example was to put the sermon in a local context and not to use difficult words. The responses from the group interview will be presented further in chapter six.

²¹⁰ Appendix VII.

The Response of the Swedish advisor Dr. Niclas Blåder

Blåder mentions in his response that he appreciates the relaxation, the freedom of the script, the natural appeal, the movements with body and eyes. He believes that those who are in the church notice that they are seen by me. He also writes that I use breaks wisely. I do not move a lot, but I move so that the situation does not become stiff. He also appreciates the freedom of the script, which he perceived was essential for me to succeed. Blåder experienced the sermon long just as Sermon One. This second sermon lasts 15 minutes. He also comments on the lack of liturgical clothing, especially the stole, which he lacked. The content of the sermon appeals to him, and he thinks it fits in well in a Serenity Prayer Mass. Blåder writes: "It is humane, loving and caring. I think that what you are preaching is about a God who, whoever wants, can extend a hand to and who you know will then be understood, without further questions or demands. I am seen and loved - just by being who I am."

One objection that Blåder mentions is the way I preach. When I construct a story the way I do, I risk creating a certain distance. Maybe there is a risk that the sermon will just be beautiful words. He says that I can be clearer with my own feelings, my own anger. He wants to elicit more emotions and objections in the sermon so that the words go even deeper.

My own Reflections

Vinslöv's parish is very homogeneous. Therefore, I wanted to raise the theme on what is foreign because I think that there may be some fear within the parish of those who are unlike us.

In this sermon, I wanted to express how God's love extends beyond borders and our understanding. How God has a greater love. How God sees a larger world. I wanted to show that when Jesus breaks boundaries with his message of love, it will always be provocative. I wanted to explore how we can name the provoked feeling we might have without judging it. For the feeling of safety in the preaching situation to last and for the listeners to be able to hear Jesus' challenging message of love, that we are all, regardless of social or cultural

background and faith, God's beloved people, I wanted to build a bridge between what is foreign to us and ourselves. That bridge consisted of me sharing that we can feel provoked sometimes. The bridge also consisted of me wanting to show how different people can meet Jesus even though we may experience these people as foreign to us.

Blåder is right when he says that the sermon is long. In many congregations in the Church of Sweden, 15 minutes is perceived as long for a sermon. The assignment from the course leader in the elective course was to preach 20 minutes, which is perhaps perceived as a normal-length sermon in the American context. I chose to let the length of the sermon lie somewhere in the middle of the different expectations.

In Serenity Prayer Services in Sweden, it is a tradition not to wear liturgical clothes. These are the only kind of mass I do not wear a stole and chasuble. The reason we do not wear liturgical clothes is that we do not want to create distance to the worshippers who in many cases are unaccustomed to participating in worship services. We want to make the thresholds low and the accessibility great for everyone who applies to our Serenity Prayer Mass.

It was wonderful and nice that the confirmands were present in the church. They managed well to attend this quiet service with much reflection and prayer. Still, it became more difficult to focus during the sermon both for me as a preacher and for those who are part of the Parish Preaching Group. I wonder if I could have made a clearer bridge between the generations if I had been aware of them coming to the service while preparing the service. I believe so.

I felt that the sermon was well received in the congregation, but I believe it did not touch emotionally as strongly as the previous sermon did with the theme of bullying. Maybe because the theme foreign does not appeal as much to our inner experiences and memories.

Summary

This research is based on two sermons, Sermon One on *John 4:4-29* and Sermon Two on *Luke 4:16-30*. The underlying purpose of the sermons for this study was to contribute to a safe preaching situation even if the subjects were existentially difficult. They were inspired by Prophetic Preaching and Gestalt Therapy. The sermons were given by heart. The methodology used for this research was an opening questionnaire and group interviews. The answers from the opening questionnaire and the transcriptions from the group interviews will be presented in next chapter.

Chapter Six

Results and Evaluation

Introduction

In chapter five the methodology and the process of the research was presented. In this chapter I will describe the result from the Opening Questionnaire and the Group Interviews with the Parish Project Group as focus group.

Results from the Opening Questionnaire

The Opening Questionnaire was given to the Parish Project Group at the end of the first meeting when the Preaching Project was introduced. It was meant to give insights into how the individuals in the Parish Project Group comprehend security. The Opening Questionnaire's answers are in the author's private archive.

The first question was about what security is for the participant.²¹¹ Several answers were about community, friends, and family.²¹² Others wrote that security is to be in a context

²¹¹ Appendix III.

²¹² Opening Questionnaire Q1 – Q2 – Q4.

where I can be myself,²¹³ where I am met with respect,²¹⁴ and where I know that I can manage my life.²¹⁵ Two people mention faith in God as a basic security.²¹⁶

In the second question, I asked the participants to describe a safe situation.²¹⁷ Topics that revolved around family and friends recurred.²¹⁸ One person gave an example of a camp where everyone aspires in the same direction and where there is a sense of community and God's presence.²¹⁹ Another of the participants described different feelings necessary for a situation to feel safe. She mentioned emotions such as calm, warmth, love, and fellowship.²²⁰ Personal health and finances were mentioned as a prerequisite for security.²²¹ Another person writes that a safe situation allows for different angles and has a loving and considerate approach to failure and thereby provides possibilities to move forward.²²² One group member mentioned different places where she feels safe: home, nature, the church room and in prayer.²²³

I can see that the participants' answers, about how they perceive security and safe situations, are about physical health, location, finances, as well as love, friendship, and community. The participants also mention a permissive atmosphere where we can be ourselves and offered opportunities to grow and move on. I see that the answers revolve around the experience of being able to be here and now with an opportunity to grow. This exemplifies the Gestalt Therapy theory, which I presented in Chapter Three, regarding the importance of being here and now to be able to move on.

The next questions were about what can facilitate or stand in the way of the opportunity to attentively listen to a sermon.

²¹³ Opening Questionnaire Q6.

²¹⁴ Opening Questionnaire Q5.

²¹⁵ Opening Questionnaire Q3.

²¹⁶ Opening Questionnaire Q2 – Q6.

²¹⁷ Appendix III.

²¹⁸ Opening Questionnaire Q1.

²¹⁹ Opening Questionnaire Q2.

²²⁰ Opening Questionnaire Q4.

²²¹ Opening Questionnaire Q3.

²²² Opening Questionnaire Q5.

²²³ Opening Questionnaire Q6.

The possibility of getting acquainted with the situation or topic described in the sermon is mentioned as something that make it easier to listen.²²⁴ One participant answered that it helps to listen if the sermon is short and concise and if the preacher speaks comprehensibly.²²⁵ A person asks for a clear common thread.²²⁶ A couple of the participants call for time for reflection.²²⁷

In regard to the question of what can stand in the way so that it becomes difficult to attentively listen, it was mentioned that several worries and feelings that you bring with you into the service can make it difficult.²²⁸ One person wrote that if the priest is not credible during the sermon presentation, it will be difficult to listen.²²⁹ Another wrote that if the preacher is too cross-confident in the sermon presentation, it makes it difficult for the listener.²³⁰

Several mentioned their own thoughts, feelings and worries that they brought into the church as an obstacle for listening to the sermon. I mentioned earlier in Chapter Three that Leonora Tubbs Tisdale has written about obstacles and strategies for Prophetic Preaching.²³¹ One strategy that Tisdale writes about is starting with the familiar and moving towards the unfamiliar.²³² By using this strategy, I perceive that it makes it easier for the listener to leave what occupies her or his thoughts behind and thereby be able to hear what the preacher wants to convey in the specific sermon. I used this strategy in Sermon Two as I started in the close context of our own church and congregation and then let the content of the sermon move out and incorporate the world.

At the end of the Opening Questionnaire, I asked the participants to request themes for the sermons that would be held within the framework of the project. Among other themes there was Bullying and Foreign which I later chose.

²²⁴ Opening Questionnaire Q3.

²²⁵ Opening Questionnaire Q4.

²²⁶ Opening Questionnaire Q2.

²²⁷ Opening Questionnaire Q5 – Q6.

²²⁸ Opening Questionnaire Q1 – Q2 – Q4 – Q6.

²²⁹ Opening Questionnaire Q3.

²³⁰ Opening Questionnaire Q5.

²³¹ Tubbs Tisdale L., *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*, 10-20, 42-62

²³² Tubbs Tisdale L., *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*, 46.

Results from the Group Interview

Group Interview after Sermon One

The group interview after Sermon One was done the day after the service was celebrated. The Parish Project Group functioned as a focus group and everyone in the Parish Project Group participated. The material from the group interview is in the author's private archive. When asking what the participants brought with them from the sermon,²³³ one of the participants answered that the sermon painted many different situations in which he could recognize himself.²³⁴ A woman replied that the dramaturgy in the sermon made the message clear. She said: "I could follow the whole way through the difficult topic until it became safe and calm at the end."²³⁵ Another woman said: "There was so much evil in the beginning, but it got brighter and brighter. I felt safe and confident that the sermon would land well. I felt a sense of security because I was involved in the different phases. I was so present myself. I got to be with you on a journey."²³⁶ One person expressed that the sermon was in a way so that she could live in what was said. Although the subject was difficult, she meant that she could be present throughout the sermon.²³⁷ The dramatized way of delivering the sermon was both appreciated and created worry. At the same time as one man expressed that it was positive,²³⁸ another person said that it felt unusual, and he wondered if the sermons would be like this in the future in the congregation.²³⁹

Some of the participants highlighted how they felt while I had talked about the evil that affects us in the sermon. One man said: "It was positive that evil was not given any space and that you instead focused on the feeling that the evil deeds evoked."²⁴⁰ Another man said: "I did not have to take responsibility for the evil when you preached."²⁴¹ The same

²³³ Appendix V.

²³⁴ Informant 3.

²³⁵ Informant 2.

²³⁶ Informant 4.

²³⁷ Informant 5.

²³⁸ Informant 1.

²³⁹ Informant 7.

²⁴⁰ Informant 1.

²⁴¹ Informant 3.

person said: “It was easy to follow in the sermon because he did not have to take responsibility, because the language was rich in pictures and dramaturgical expressions, and because the chair and the water in the baptismal font helped me listen, because your voice reflected what you said and because I had small pauses between sentences.”²⁴² He had experienced a strong atmosphere in the church and said: “The sermon was like a calibration as you do with measuring instruments. When you want to find the right value for a device, you must first focus, that is, find the zero position. You helped me with that during the sermon so that I could then look up and look at Jesus”.²⁴³

When asked about the participants' emotional reactions during the sermon,²⁴⁴ a man answered that it felt good to be able to go on a journey where their own experiences had a place, and that the sermon was without the expression of guilt. He said: “I carry with me the feeling of being so taken by the sermon. It was not just words that rushed forward. It was something much more.”²⁴⁵ One woman said: “I felt that it was dark at first, but it got brighter. If you dare to talk about bullying, you may eventually feel the confidence that you can tell yourself.”²⁴⁶ But there were not only positive emotions that were expressed during the group interview. One man said: “It was a beautiful story, but what do you get out of it? Reality is not always so bright.”²⁴⁷

When asked how the participants had physically reacted during the sermon,²⁴⁸ a man said: “When you said that Jesus does not judge, just stated it, it broke in me. Then the tears flowed, and I could not defend myself. I felt a need to just sit still. I got the feeling that you really believe what you are talking about.”²⁴⁹

I asked the participants to tell me how they experienced the contact with me as a preacher.²⁵⁰ A man mentioned that he felt seen and that he felt that I spoke to him. He had

²⁴² Informant 3.

²⁴³ Informant 3.

²⁴⁴ Appendix V.

²⁴⁵ Informant 3.

²⁴⁶ Informant 4.

²⁴⁷ Informant 7.

²⁴⁸ Appendix V.

²⁴⁹ Informant 3.

²⁵⁰ Appendix V.

felt that he was making eye contact with me.²⁵¹ One woman mentioned that I had told her before the sermon that I was nervous, but that she had not experienced me as nervous during the sermon. She had been sitting far back in the church but that the contact with me had still felt close.²⁵² One man said: “I usually feel restful and usually enjoy listening to your sermons, but this time it felt different.”²⁵³ Someone said: “You let the silence speak. I felt close to you. I shared the same room.”²⁵⁴

The last question was about what advice they had for me before perusing Sermon Two.²⁵⁵ Several expressed that it was good as it was. They had nothing to add or take away.

Group Interview after Sermon Two

The group interview after Sermon Two was done directly after the Serenity Prayer Mass was celebrated. The Parish Project Group functioned also this time as a focus group and six out of seven in the Parish Project Group participated.

When I asked what the participants brought with them from the sermon,²⁵⁶ several mentioned that the context of the sermon was initially in the local community, in Vinslöv and in the neighboring village of Önnestad, and that this made it easier to listen.²⁵⁷ A man said: “The sermon was in my everyday life and I could interpret it in my life. It made me curious to continue listening.”²⁵⁸ Several also brought with them new thoughts about Jesus from the sermon.²⁵⁹ A woman said: “I liked to hear how Jesus was already at the precipice. That he is there before us. I felt invited into God's arms. I felt a great sense of security.”²⁶⁰ Another woman said: “I take with me how you told me that Jessie left the church, and I was struck by the thought: Am I driving him out?”²⁶¹ A man said: “It was unusual for me to think

²⁵¹ Informant 1.

²⁵² Informant 2.

²⁵³ Informant 7.

²⁵⁴ Informant 3.

²⁵⁵ Appendix V.

²⁵⁶ Appendix VII.

²⁵⁷ Informants 1, 2, 3.

²⁵⁸ Informant 3.

²⁵⁹ Informants 3, 4, 6.

²⁶⁰ Informant 4.

²⁶¹ Informant 6.

that Jesus would come now. It was such a strange thought to me. It must have been as foreign to the Jews when Jesus came to the synagogue in Nazareth.”²⁶² One woman noted that she experienced the sermon as poetic because some words rhymed.²⁶³

When asked about the participants' emotional reactions, we talked about how we experienced the presence of the large group of 28 confirmands who participated in the service, and of whom most of these young people were quite unaccustomed to celebrating services. Their presence had affected several of the participants. One man said: “I have to say that the confirmands behaved well. It was good that they were there, but still they disturbed my concentration. I want to sit in my bubble during Serenity Prayer Mass. I have a need to let it be my own journey during these evenings.”²⁶⁴ One woman said: “I got a feeling of fear when I thought about how easy it is for many in a crowd to start reacting negatively. It can become a dangerous group pressure, as during football matches, life-threatening. It can be hard to be yourself.”²⁶⁵

When I asked how the participants had reacted physically during the sermon,²⁶⁶ one person replied that he had bounced when he understood that Jessie K in the sermon was Jesus Christ.²⁶⁷

I asked the group to tell me how they had experienced the contact with me as a preacher during Sermon Two.²⁶⁸ One man replied: “The contact was there all the time because you look at us and had eye contact with us. I feel you want contact. The fact that you preach by heart means that there is a presence from you. You came off track at some point and you had to think. I experienced it as positive. It is good for us worshipers when it can be quiet for a while. Then I catch up with my thoughts.”²⁶⁹

²⁶² Informant 3.

²⁶³ Informant 6.

²⁶⁴ Informant 3.

²⁶⁵ Informant 6.

²⁶⁶ Appendix VII.

²⁶⁷ Informant 3.

²⁶⁸ Appendix VII.

²⁶⁹ Informant 3.

My last question to the Parish Project Group was about what thoughts had been raised in the participants regarding how the preacher can contribute to creating as safe a preaching situation as possible.²⁷⁰ One woman replied that she perceived the message as important when I put the sermon in the local context. She also thought that it is good if you use ordinary words.²⁷¹ Another woman said: "I think that security is created when you meet with the gaze, when you meet the worshippers physically. When there is eye contact, there is also presence."²⁷² One man said that the safety aspect was felt stronger when I stood more still during the sermon because then there was more focus on the words. He thought it was good when I, as a preacher, varied the voice during the sermon.²⁷³ Finally, another man said that it was good when the same person welcomed the congregation before the service began and then preached. He said: "Then the service was woven together, and the preacher did not become like an artist who gets up when it is time. In this way, you made contact even before the Serenity Prayer Mass began."²⁷⁴

Summary

In Chapter Six I have presented the result from the Opening Questionnaire and the Group Interviews with the Parish Project Group as focus group. In Chapter Seven I will use the material I have collected in this research and try to give an answer to the thesis Question: *How can I, as a preacher, create a safe preaching situation for the listener?*

²⁷⁰ Appendix VII.

²⁷¹ Informant 6.

²⁷² Informant 2.

²⁷³ Informant 3.

²⁷⁴ Informant 1.

Chapter Seven

Homiletical Significance

Opening Remarks

This thesis is a result of my desire to explore how I can create a safe preaching situation during the Serenity Prayer Mass in Vinslöv Parish. From my experience, the Serenity Prayer Mass is a place where worshipers, both accustomed and unaccustomed to church services, come because they want to reflect deeply over their lives and their context. I want to take this longing for a space for reflection seriously and preach in a way so that the listener feels safe. I also want the sermon to become a dialogue for the listener with his or her own memories and experiences from the past to see how this dialogue can affect their life here and now. It has been a challenge to preach on topics that are existentially difficult because the subject matter also affected me as a preacher, both before and after the sermon but also while delivering the sermon. It has been a challenge to look at preaching from the perspective of Prophetic Preaching, where one does not give in to what is difficult and where one deals with what threatens God's intention for humanity. Learning about Gestalt Therapy and the techniques used to help people reflect on their lives has affected my way of seeing myself as a preacher on a deeper level than I initially thought. The study has encouraged me to be brave enough to take on challenging issues even though they make me feel insecure. At the same time, it has become a way to find a different kind of security in my role as a preacher, even if I feel vulnerable because of sharing personal experiences and thereby exposing myself.

But the thesis question is not about me as a preacher but rather about whether I in the role of being a preacher can create a safe preaching situation for the listener. In the following, I will evaluate the learnings and thoughts of the study and discuss and whether the thesis question can be answered.

Prophetic Preaching

In Chapter Three, I described how Prophetic Preaching can be defined. I also wrote about obstacles and strategies for Prophetic Preaching that Leonora Tubbs Tisdale has written about in the book *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*. I also presented Frank A. Tomas' thoughts on Dangerous Sermons from the books *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon* and *Surviving a Dangerous Sermon*.

One obstacle that Tisdale mentions is that preachers choose not to preach prophetically out of concern for the congregation because it is not believed that worshipers have the strength to hear about what is difficult in a world where we are surrounded by many difficulties anyway. What I have heard during the group interviews, with the Parish Project as a focus group, is that the participants feel that it is important that we do talk about what is difficult and what is challenging. From the perspective of Gestalt Therapy, I have been encouraged to talk about existentially difficult topics because, according to Gestalt therapists, we need to talk about the things that affect us negatively here and now. Gestalt theories claim that we need to connect with what is rubbing and worrying us within, so as to be able to get that anxiety and fear to come up to the surface. We need to meet what is difficult in order to get through it and this is necessary to be able to look ahead and to live here and now without being unconsciously negatively affected by what is in our history.

Two other obstacles to Prophetic Preaching that Tisdale mentions are the fear of conflict and the fear of being disliked or rejected. I can recognize myself in this concern because, while preaching about the difficult topics of bullying and of that which is foreign, not only was the congregation challenged but, I as a preacher felt vulnerable. In Sermon One I shared my own experiences of bullying and in Sermon Two I made statements on topics related to integration and how God views us humans regardless of which religion we belong to. I felt that it took courage to dare to expose myself in this way. In Gestalt Therapy, one of the key concepts I have presented is *contact*. Through this study I have experienced that both demonstrated vulnerability and clarity create grounds for contact with those we meet and that this requires courage. The fear of conflict or being disliked is not groundless.

There is a risk of conflict and distancing when preachers preach prophetically about existentially difficult topics. During the course of the project, I have met a lot of appreciation for the sermons that have been delivered within the framework of the project, but there has also been negative feedback concerning the way I chose to preach, as well as about me as a person.

In Chapter Three, I also presented some of Tisdale's strategies for prophetic proclamation. One strategy was to start with the familiar and move towards the unfamiliar. I used this in both sermons. In Sermon One by showing and sharing personal and other people's experiences of bullying and then moving on to talk about the Samaritan woman's situation in Sychar. In Sermon Two by creating a story that moved out of the church where we were, which then moved beyond the geographical boundaries of the parish and then even further out into the world. The group interview after Sermon Two showed that this movement attracted a lot of attention. It was perceived as good and easy to get into the sermon when it started in the near and familiar and then moved towards what could be experienced as more and more foreign.

Another strategy that I mention in Chapter Three is to invite the listeners to stand in the shoes of another and viewing the world from a different perspective. In Sermon One I tried to do this by describing different situations where different people had experienced bullying. My intention was to let the listeners explore their own memories that might be similar to the situations I had portrayed.

The third strategy I described in Chapter Three was to stand with the congregation rather than opposite the congregation. I tried to do this in Sermon Two when I talked about how we can be provoked by the idea that God helps those who are so foreign to us that we really cannot understand them. Those we consider to be our enemies. I say in the sermon that we can be provoked by this and that it is understandable because we are human and as human beings we need boundaries, both geographical and moral, to feel safe. In this way, I wanted to stand with those in the church who may feel provoked and without judging show that it is human. I express that we may need boundaries, but that God's love is boundless.

The strategies presented, I think, can facilitate the possibility of creating a safe preaching situation, despite the fact that the message and the topic can be harsh.

Dangerous Sermons

In Chapter Three I also presented Frank A. Thomas' thoughts on dangerous sermons and found his four qualities of moral imagination to be useful when the preacher is preparing a dangerous sermon.

The first quality was: *Envision equality and represent that by one's physical presence.*

I chose to preach by heart and I have received positive response both from my advisors and during the group interviews. I think I am perceived as more present in the room when preaching by heart because I can move more freely and, above all, make eye contact with those who listen. I can recognize myself in Joseph M. Webb's words in *Preaching without Notes* that preaching without notes makes an intense bonding between the preacher and those who listen. During the group interview after Sermon One a man said that he got the feeling that I really believed what I was talking about, and he thought I was credible in my way of presenting my thoughts. Perhaps the fact that I preached by heart contributed to this experience.

Preaching by heart creates a contact surface for what Gestalt Therapy highlights as highly important: awareness and contact. And as I have understood, through studies of Gestalt Therapy and in conversations with Gestalt therapist Petra Lindblom, contact is fundamental to the feeling of security.

The second quality was: *Use sympathy as a catalyst or bridge to create opportunities to overcome the past and make new decisions for peace and justice.*

I think that Martin Buber's thoughts on "I and Thou" and "I and it" contributed to creating sympathy for the foreign in Sermon Two when I talked about that we have a choice. We can either look at others as strangers and nothing happens, the stranger remains a stranger and the other becomes an object in our eyes, or we can look upon each other with interest and as equal and then the stranger is transformed into a You, a subject.

The third quality was: *Find wisdom in ancient texts, sources of ancient wisdom and truth, the wisdom of the ages.*

I intend to always base my preaching on some biblical text because I believe it is this ancient text that gives credibility to the sermon. That the sermon is based on a specific text from the Scriptures gives a sense of security in the sermon situation because the sermon is anchored on something that is much greater than the preacher's personal interpretation of the text.

The fourth quality mentioned by Frank A. Thomas was: *The language of poetry and art that lifts and elevates the human spirit by touching the emotive chords of wonder, mystery and hope.*

I think that whether poetry and art can create a sense of security during the preaching situation depends on how we are as people in regard to artistic expressions, as well as, what our expectations are of how a sermon should be. Sermon One was delivered in a sort of dramatized way. This was perceived by some in the Parish Project Group as positive and for someone as worrying and unfamiliar. One person during the group interview said that there was poetry in my sermon and that she liked it. The fact that I sang at the end of Sermon One has only been commented on by one person, the American advisor, Wagner, but not by others. During Sermon One, I had put a drawing of an eye on the altar as a connection to my talk about a seeing God. This picture has not been commented on by anyone. I do not know, but it may be that the language of poetry and art can be difficult to concretely discover, but that it still affects us. It is also difficult to answer the question of whether the language of poetry and art can contribute to a safe preaching situation. It would be interesting to further develop that idea in another project later.

Gestalt Therapy

In chapter four I explained the word Gestalt as meaning form, figure, shape or whole perceived against a ground. With the help of Betty David's image, where you can either see a chalice or two faces in profile depending on how you look at the picture, I explained how different patterns or figures appear in our own lives. As a preacher I can recognize this aspect of seeing different things in the same picture when I am preparing sermons. Even if I

have preached many times on a certain Bible text different perspectives within the text come up every time. Different gestalts emerge from the text and ask to be preached about. I think that this way of exploring the biblical text opens up for the inductive way of preaching, where the answers are not given. Instead, the preacher invites the listener to walk along and explore the text on a personal level. The thoughts in Gestalt Therapy, about gestalts that appear and disappear but are always included in a whole, are rewarding for me based on the way I look at the Bible stories in prayer and sermon writing.

I also think that an aspect of Gestalt Therapy that correlates with the way of thinking in inductive preaching is the focus on the question "How?" rather than the question "Why?" Contemplating how different Bible characters appear on different occasions and the focus on the question "How?" may increase a preacher's confidence to dare to explore and elevate different perspectives. But, if the preacher can convey this confidence to the listeners by preaching inductively, I cannot answer within the framework of this study.

In Sermon One, I tried to use a variant of the "Hot Seat" or "empty chair" by having a highchair in front of the baptismal font and letting the woman from Sychar in the sermon speak to Jesus as if he were sitting on the chair. When I spoke the thoughts of Jesus and looked at the woman, I sat on the chair myself. It was a way to test whether the "empty chair" could help the listener to gain new insights and open up for a broader possibility of experiences during the sermon. It is difficult, though, to draw any clear conclusions as to whether the experiment with the "empty chair" created greater security in the preaching situation. My hope was that the "empty chair" would provide an opportunity for the listener to ask Jesus questions as if he was sitting there. As I wrote in chapter Six, a man answered during the group interview after Sermon One that; *the Sermon was like a calibration as you do with measuring instruments. When you want to find the right value for a device, you must first make a focus, that is, find the zero position. You helped me with that during the sermon so that I could then look up and look at Jesus.* My own reflection is that perhaps the "empty chair" may have contributed to this experience.

Concluding Reflection

At the end of the group interview after Sermon Two, I asked what thoughts had been raised in the participants regarding how the preacher can contribute to creating as safe a preaching situation as possible. They answered:

- That the preacher uses common words.
- That the preacher preaches without notes.
- That the preacher does not move too much during the sermon.
- That the preachers voice varies.
- That it is the same person who greets before the service who later preaches.

The thesis question of this study is: *How can I, as a preacher, create a safe preaching situation for the listener?*

Many methods have been tried during this research project. I perceive that they have helped me to understand how I as a preacher can create a safe preaching situation for the listener, even while preaching on difficult topics. The clearest and most concrete answers, in regard to if the listener experienced feeling safe during the sermon, are provided by the answers I received from the Parish Project Group presented above.

I have learned a lot during this journey both about myself as a preacher and how the sermon can be received by those who listen. I am grateful to have shared this project challenge with the people of my own congregation who had the opportunity to listen to the sermons. I also want to thank the Parish Project Group, the advisors and all the inspiring lecturers and teachers who have generously shared their knowledge during my doctoral journey in the ACTS DMin program.

Appendix I

Letter of Invitation

Dear _____,

For 2.5 years, I have participated in a qualified preacher training program affiliated with the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago.

I will now do my third and last year and the ACTS Doctor of Ministry (D.Min) in the Preaching Program. This will end with a thesis that I will write after I have completed a preaching ministry project in the congregation.

I wonder if you would like to be part of a reference group that is to meet a few times during the autumn, and most importantly of all, to be present on two occasions when I preach Serenity Prayer Mass in the congregation. The reference group is important for the project and for me, so I get to hear what you see, hear and experience during the sermon. The reference group shall consist of 6 - 8 people.

The occasions that I want the reference group to come are:

- August 18, at 18-20 in the Church House. Introduction to the sermon project and what it means to be a reference group.
- A meeting during week 35 where we talk together about the Bible text and the theme for the upcoming service as preparation for my sermon writing. Day and time we decide together on September 18.
- September 16, at 6.30 pm, Serenity Prayer Mass in Vinslöv Church where the first sermon is held.
- A meeting shortly after September 16 where we talk about what you saw, heard and experienced during the sermon. Day and time we decide together on September 18.
- A meeting during v. 41 where we talk together about the Bible text and the theme for the upcoming service as preparation for my sermon writing. Day and time we decide together on September 18.
- October 28, at 6.30 pm, Serenity Prayer Mass in Vinslöv Church where the second sermon of the project is held. Immediately after the Mass, we gather in the Church House to talk about what you have seen, heard and experienced during the sermon.
- A follow-up meeting during week 49. Day and time we decide together on September 18.

I hope you would like to join me during this journey!
Do you want to? Can you?

Sincerely
Ida

Appendix II

Consent Form²⁷⁵

I am very grateful that you will participate in the study of *Preaching in Serenity Prayer Mass; A Safe Place for the Difficult Questions that Reflects how Evil is at Work in our Life Situations*. I am trying to learn more about how I, in a secure way, can preach about difficult topics and keep the listeners focused and open. This preaching ministry project contains two sermons held during Serenity Prayer Mass in the congregation.

If you consent you will be a part of a reference group, in English called Parish Project Group (PPG). In the study, you will answer an inquiry in the beginning of the project. We will also meet before the sermons are written to talk about the Bible texts and the themes of the sermons. You are expected to come to the services when the two sermons are held. You will also participate in Group Interviews after the actual Serenity Prayer Mass.

Those meetings will take approximately 1-2 hours each.

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may still refuse to answer any question you do not wish to answer. You may also withdraw from the study at any time.

Your name will be kept confidential in all the writing related to this study.

By signing this Consent Form, you are agreeing to the conditions mentioned above. Be sure that you have got all the answers to your questions. If you agree to participate in this study a copy of this document, signed by us both, will be given to you.

If you have any questions about the purpose of the study or about your participation, please call me or send me an e-mail.

Date

Participant's signature

Date

Researcher's signature

²⁷⁵ The model for this Consent Form is found in: Sensing. *Qualitative Research*, Appendix 1, 235.

Appendix III

Opening questionnaire

- 1) What is security for you?
- 2) If you were to describe a safe situation with three sentences. What would you write then?
- 3) What do you need to be able to listen attentively to a sermon on a difficult subject?
- 4) What can stand in the way of you being able to listen attentively to a sermon?
- 5) What themes would you like the sermons to be based on? They should be themes about how evil can affect our lives in different ways.

Appendix IV

Sermon One

Theme: Bullying

John 4: 4-29

Sermon Purpose Statement

In times of increasingly harsh language and judgment in our society and where many of us have experienced various forms of bullying, I want listeners to experience that it is possible to let go of difficult memories or situations, by means of a safe space created by being present and by way of sharing vulnerability through the telling of the story of John 4: 4-29. This to show how God looks at us through the eyes of love and shows us ways out of memories and situations that prevent us from being who God created us to be.

Sermon

It is in the early 80's and we were in a snowy field below the school after the end of the school day. The snow formed hard thick layers and sharp shards which covered the field.

Some children moved across the field and suddenly, as if without warning, the children turned to a girl in the group and started throwing snow at her. The girl crouches down to protect herself, huddled together into a ball. And snow wells over her, large flakes of snow land on her back and head. "I will sit still until it passes", she thinks, and finally, when almost her whole body is covered by the white, hard, cold, the others go away. The girl gets up, brushes off the snow and ice and goes home. *I did not understand what happened. I did not understand why it happened. Was it perhaps my own fault that it happened? Was I wrong?* She does not tell anyone. She encapsulates the memory in a cold feeling and lets it remain somewhere inside the body. There the memory lay, beyond sight.

Many of us carry similar memories of when the needlesticking words and actions hit us and encapsulate us.

Like the child who walks to school and knows that over there, at the intersection, he who throws stones and swear words might be standing and that she must get through to get to school. Even the days when the boy is not standing there, he is still standing there. The heart rate rises, the fear and discomfort increase each time the child approaches the intersection. Even if he is not there, he will be there and the words that diminish, humiliate reach the child anyway. The message is clear: You are not worth anything. Could that be true?

Or like the worker who comes back the first day after the holidays and sees some colleagues standing and talking some distance away. He raises his hand to greet, but he is not greeted back. Maybe they did not see him? He raises his hand again, looking for their eyes a second and a third time. But no... He is unseen. The hand falls heavily.

Or like the child who at an early school age is told that she cannot draw, or sing, or express oneself. Small words become truths that affect a whole self-image, and a flowing creativity is closed behind closed doors.

It is in the middle of the day. The sun is at its highest in the sky and it is hot. Jesus sits by the well of Sychar and rests. He leans his back against the stones of the well edge that cools slightly. The Disciples have gone away to buy food.

He looks out over the landscape. It's dry. It has been a long time since the rain fell. Nature changes into yellow and brown. A bit further away is a town. It's quiet there. Everyone has gone to rest during the hottest hour of the day. They seek shade and tranquillity. Everyone is resting.

No, not all are resting, a figure detaches itself from the silhouette of the village. A person moves along the path that leads to the well. She's a lonely woman. She is carrying a pot that she wants to fill with water. She walks alone with her eyes fixed on the ground. She does not want to take up any place, does not want to be seen. Would prefer to be transparent. Hardly any shadow is seen on the ground around her. The shadow is inside.

But she must have water and therefore she goes to the well in the middle of the day - because then she knows that no one else is there. The sun burns on her shoulders but not nearly as strongly as how the villagers' eyes burn when she gets close to them.

Jesus looks at the woman. Sees her posture, her history, and her knots that are deeply hidden within.

Only when the woman comes close to the well does she look up and see Him. She jerks back and immediately wants to turn around, but He addresses her and says: Give me something to drink. And somewhere at the bottom of her soul there is still a piece of self-esteem and courage remaining and she starts talking to Him.

They share vulnerability and courage with each other during the conversation. They talk about the water in the well and about another kind of water, Living Water, He calls it. They talk about where the place is to worship God. They talk about how life has turned out. Jesus states that she has had five husbands and that she is not married to the one she lives with. He states it but does not judge.

When Jesus talks about himself, she understands who he is and this whole flow of conversation began when Jesus reached out his hand and asked for help: Give me something to drink... This was a meeting created by an open gaze, which ran out of vulnerability and was driven by courage, courage that comes from the heart.

God is the God of sight, who knows who we are and who heals from the sources of vulnerability. Jesus is brave and vulnerable in all his essence. Therefore, the Son of God himself is born into vulnerability, in a stable. He grows up as a refugee child, as an adult he has no home of his own, in his vulnerability he is questioned, he is beaten, he is crucified, and he dies. But out of vulnerability also comes life, and when even God proves to be vulnerable, the sources of life open, the dust gates open, knots dissolve, icy memories melt away, and life takes new paths.

Jesus remains at the well. He looked at the woman who left her empty pot on the edge of the well and ran down to the village to tell about what she had seen and heard. The pot had

to be left unfilled, because this time it was not the pot that was to be filled but the woman herself who was filled with the water of Life.

The Son's gaze follows her on her way back to the village. She is full of life, courage, and joy after being seen with the eyes of love.

The eyes of love look at you too, help you untie old knots, lead you to new paths where you can be who you are meant to be.

The God of sight looks at you and pulls up the water gates that hinder your flow, your creativity, your being, and God says: The water I give becomes a source in you that gives eternal life. *(The preacher sings) The water I give becomes a fountain in you that gives eternal life.* I give you a life that seeks openness and joy. I give you a life that flows with hope and new opportunities.

A life that finds its way out of snowdrifts and beyond, out of the grinding fear along the school road and beyond, out of dismissive situations where you do not feel welcome, and your hand falls heavily after an unanswered greeting. A life that shines out of the eyes of children who look at you and say: But you can certainly draw or sing or express yourself. Everyone can!

Jesus looks at you and says: The water I give becomes a fountain in you that gives eternal life. Seek that source, and you will find me! *(The preacher sings) The water I give becomes a fountain in you that gives eternal life.*

Appendix V

Group Interview Questions, Sermon One

- 1) This is what I take with me from the sermon:
- 2) How did it feel to experience a sermon about bullying?
- 3) If you were to talk about your emotional reactions during the sermon, what would you say then?
- 4) Tell me how you physically reacted during the sermon.
- 5) Tell me how you experienced the contact with the preacher.
- 6a) For you to feel good in the preaching situation, is there something you want to tell me before the next sermon?
- b) Why do you think so?

Appendix VI

Sermon Two Elective Course

Theme: Foreign
Luke 4: 16-30

Sermon Purpose Statement

In view of the growing mistrust in society between the familiar and the foreign, I want the listeners to experience how God's love extends beyond our own borders by means of conveying how Jesus shows the people in the synagogue in Nazareth that God helps those who are outside their own group, even those who are foreign to us and whom we do not understand, through a sermon based on Luke 4: 16-30.

Sermon

Imagine a little boy who was born here in the village around Christmas 30 years ago, in 1991. Let's call him Jessie, Jessie Kristensson, also called Jessie K or JK. He was baptized here in our baptismal font, participated in the church's childhood lessons and later in After School. When he was 14, he was confirmed here in the church and after that he was in the youth group until he felt ready for it. After he graduated High School, he started working as a carpenter's apprentice at the local construction company.

Imagine we started hearing rumours about him. That he talked about God on social media in a way we were not used to, that he gathered many people around him. Not here, but in Önnestad. Imagine that we heard rumours about miracles and oddities.

Once he came here one Sunday, we had not seen him here for a long time. In the midst of the service, he gets up, goes to the front of the church, takes the Bible, flips through the Book of Isaiah and begins to read: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.*

Finally, the Messiah has reappeared. Finally, God makes himself clear again. Finally, we no longer must worry about whether the money will last the whole month. Finally, the clarity comes to Vinslöv and the entire municipality of Hässleholm and the politicians, the leaders, we ourselves will understand what decisions are right and proper. Finally, the shackles twisted by bondage, stress, anxiety, and sadness break. Finally, the oppression disappears from Vinslöv, inequality and injustice. Finally, we get to put all the responsibility in your hands, Jessie K, and everything will be fine! Just as we have longed for!

JK looks at each of us in the church. After a while the gaze goes towards the church gate, out through the door, out over the parish and past the parish geographical boundaries and out over the world.

His gaze leaves the close and familiar and looks away at what is foreign to us and a little scary.

And, JK looks at the young man who for the second time is in prison for something he should not have done but did anyway. He looks inside the young man. He sees his background, his history, his upbringing. He sees the society he has grown up in and the systems that have influenced him. And he whispers: *Man, I see you. I know that it is so desperately difficult with all the resistance, all the anger and fear that you carry within you, but I want to walk the path of peace with you. Let me go by your side.*

And he raises his eyes again and looks away at a couple of parents in Yemen who do not know if they have any food at all for their children the next day or next week. And JK whispers to them the words of consolation, which do not satiate, but which perhaps give them a little more strength, a little more.

What happens to us when we think that he looks so far away that his eyes are fixed on those who are so foreign to us that we really cannot understand them. Those we consider to be our enemies.

Are we being provoked?

As the people became in Nazareth?

When Jesus came and told us that God helps beyond our own borders, even helps our enemies, that which is so foreign that we do not want to know about it?

Yes, we can probably be provoked. When God's care for man reaches beyond the familiar, well-known, even as far as what is so foreign that we really cannot understand it, then the provoked, disappointed feeling can reach us. It is understandable. Because we are human, with our need to have boundaries, geographical and moral. We want to live by what we believe is good and right. We want God to see our endeavour and we want that God respond to it.

But do we go so far as to want to drive Jesus out of the church when he says things we do not want to hear? Pushes him all the way to the edge of the precipice?

No, we do not. Because he's already there. He is already standing next to the precipice where life is fragile and desperate.

He is there when someone thinks about whether life is really worth living.

He is there on the precipice when someone is sitting with the phone in his hand just about to take out his first SMS loan and then the debt carousel starts.

He is there on the precipice when someone is so strongly attracted to his addiction that he considers, after all, tasting, testing, buying, and trying again. Just one more time cannot make any difference?

But Jesus knows that it makes a difference, a difference of life and death when you are so close to the precipice. That's why he's there. That's where he's supposed to be.

Because he sees man. And he loves what he sees. He does not love everything we do. But he loves us for who we are. Unique, a creation of God, One of a kind. In the loving gaze we become equal, and it is the similarity we need to focus on when we look at each other.

I think of my friend who fled Syria in 2015 with her husband and daughter. She is not like me. She wears a veil and prays to Allah. She speaks fluent Arabic and struggles with Swedish. We have different beliefs, different backgrounds, are born in different cultures. But we have so much in common. We both love good food, we wish our children a safe upbringing, good role models, good friends and that they can go to school. We get happy when we see each other, when we share our lives and try to help each other.

We have a choice when we face the strange.

Either we can choose to look at each other as strangers and nothing else happens. The foreign remains foreign and the other becomes in our eyes an object, one in which we do not have to invest any emotion. One that we can reject or ignore.

Or we can look at each other with interested eyes as equals. The stranger transforms into a you, a subject and we begin to care. The boundaries are shifted. The world is getting bigger. Love reaches farther.

Do we dare?

It's not easy.

We may not dare or want to all the time.

But maybe we will dare someday. Say hello to the person we experience as a stranger. Say: Hi, can I get to know you?

For Jesus nobody is a stranger. Jesus sees us all the way in. He knows who we are. He knows our background, our upbringing. Know why we do as we do. And he takes us by the hand and says: *Man, I see you. I know it's so desperately difficult at times, but I want to walk the path of peace with you. Let me go by your side.*

And he gets up, stands here in the church, takes the Bible, flips through the Book of Isaiah and reads:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

Appendix VII

Group Interview Questions, Sermon Two

- 1) This is what I take with me from the sermon:
- 2) How did it feel to experience a sermon about the foreign?
- 3) If you were to talk about your emotional reactions during the sermon, what would you say then?
- 4) Tell me how you physically reacted during the sermon.
- 5) Tell me how you experienced the contact with the preacher.
- 6) Now that you have participated in two services in the preaching project, what thoughts have been raised in you regarding how the preacher can contribute to creating as safe a preaching situation as possible?

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