

Sermons at All Saints Church, Luxembourg

Preached by Rev Geoff Read on Sunday 2nd June 2024

Text: Luke 6:43-45 & Galatians 5:16-26

Freedom is a hugely important word to people here at All Saints

Some have taken the painful choice to leave their homeland to maintain their own freedom and that of their family

Others are working tirelessly for others' freedom in the field of human rights

Some are working tirelessly from here for the freedom of their own country, Ukraine, supporting the battle with resources, initiatives, prayer

Others are moved deeply by the plight of Palestine, of Gaza, and the freedom to live peacefully with Israel in a shared land

Some are seeking to stand tall for freedom in the field of racial justice or other prejudice

Others are seeking to stand tall for freedom in the face of personal addiction, recurring temptation, or emotional injury

Christians believe that freedom lies at the heart of the big story, God's story for all human beings

We are made for freedom, that's God's original purpose: but through sin – ours and others – we find ourselves under what St Paul calls in the letter to the Galatians “a yoke of slavery”

We see that in the yoke forced upon us by circumstances and by others in the situations I have just mentioned

But we also experience it in our personal lives, as we desire to live the freedom, but like the supermarket trolley that however hard we try to go this way takes us the other, we find ourselves going the other way too

On Pentecost Sunday, I spoke about how God through the Holy Spirit re-stories us, tells us not just who we are but whose we are – we are His: by creation and by winning us a costly freedom from the penalty of sin and also the power of sin

In this letter to the church in Galatia, chapter 2, vv19-20, Paul declares this freedom from the penalty of sin like this:

I have been crucified by Christ and it is I who no longer live, but it is Christ who lives in me (2:19b, 20a)

He then goes on to say that in this cross of Christ we are also set free from the power of sin:

And the life I live in flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (20b)

In an amazing way freedom to choose is restored to us, freedom to respond to what life brings to us rather than simply react

It's what one secular writer, Stephen Covey, calls having response-ability

In our reading Paul puts it like this:

For you were called to freedom, only do not use your freedom for self-indulgence. (5:13)

Live by the Spirit and do not gratify the desires of the flesh (5:16)

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (5:24)

Lets explore what that means

But to make it real, I want to invite you to pause and bring to mind an area in your life where you are struggling to do the thing you know to be right, but that you are failing with again and again

Pause to pray

Live by the Spirit and do not gratify the desires of the flesh (5:16)

One thing you need to know is that the word translated as “live” is actually in Greek “walk”: walk by the Spirit

The early Christians were called people of the Way, followers of Jesus who said I am the Way, and who says Come follow me, walk with me and I will walk with you.

The other thing you need to know is that “the Spirit” is the Holy Spirit. If you say Jesus is Lord that Holy Spirit lives within you to re-story you (tell and remind you Whose you are) and to restore you (to right living – for what and how)

Look at v25: *If we walk by the Spirit let us also be guided by the Spirit*

And this walking and guiding by the Spirit is about how we live out freedom in our daily lives

Not sitting in the quiet of a meditation room but ...

- in a busy hallway getting the kids off to school when it's so easy to snap with anger,
- in your office when the temptation is so strong to talk ourselves up and others down

Walking and guiding by the Spirit happens ...

- In the doctor's surgery as we face bad news about our health or that of a loved one and find ourselves spiralling down into anxiety
- As we make choices about how to spend time and money, be it out of much or little, choosing whether to indulge self rather than enable others

It happens in front of porn sites on laptops, biscuit tins in kitchens, and alcohol bottles alone in front of the TV

Indeed any and every time we know what the right thing is, we long to do it, but find ourselves unable to do so

At those moments we need not simply react with one of the reactions Paul calls “works of the flesh” and lists in v19

Instead the freedom we now have in Christ empowers us to respond with one of the responses Paul calls “fruit of the Holy Spirit” and lists in vv22-23

Eventually those choices become growing attitudes, fruit

As we step into the freedom between stimuli and response the Holy Spirit empowers us to choose

To say No or Yes – something that in our own strength is sometimes so hard Paul describes it in v24 as “crucifying the flesh with its passions and desires” (v24)

And note this: crucifixion was not like the instant death by firing squad

It was a slow, gradual thing

So too the process of choosing freedom from the ingrained habits and attitudes that up to now have shaped us, choosing to say No in order to say Yes – its slow but sure

And hear this: the God who has won us freedom and now offers us freedom will also empower us to choose freedom by the Holy Spirit as we walk by the Spirit, day by day

And so

- in a busy hallway getting the kids off to school when it's so easy to snap with anger the simple prayer of "Help" prompted by the Spirit allows the Spirit to enter in to grow in us the fruit of patience
- in your office when the temptation is so strong to talk ourselves up and others down the Holy Spirit prompted unspoken turning in desire towards God allows the Spirit to enter in and grow in us the fruit of kindness

Walking and guiding by the Spirit happens ...

- as we prepare for the visit to the doctor's surgery and, prompted by the Spirit, we remember we are part of a praying community, asking others to carry us in prayer, that grows in us the fruit of peace of God which passes all understanding ...
- or when, prompted by the Spirit, you pause to ask Jesus what He wants you to do with the resources He has given you, including money, and so the Holy Spirit fruit of generosity grows.

The same is true in front of porn sites on laptops, biscuit tins in kitchens, and alcohol bottles alone in front of the TV – stepping into freedom to choose, prompted by the Spirit, allows the Holy Spirit to grow in us the fruit of self-control

And remember this: all of the "you-s" of this passage are plural

We are people of the Way, fellow followers of Jesus

Honest community is where we can share the trials and temptations we face and find the support of others, who will be the ones who pray for the Spirit to empower us for making successful responses, and be hands by which God picks us up again and again and set us on our way walking again by the Spirit when we fail

Just look ahead a little to the first verses of chapter 6 and hear this:

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who walk by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. ² Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.

The Kenyan theologian John Mbiti puts it like this:

I am because we are, and because we are therefore I am

Which is why it's so great we are called All Saints – on the road of growing together in the fruit of the Holy Spirit, in holiness

- This what freedom looks like –
- Re-storied to know whose I am

Restored in community to grow day by day, challenge by challenge in the fruit of holy living

... and all in the power of the Holy Spirit! *Invitation to prayer ministry afterwards*