

Sermons at All Saints Anglican Church, Luxembourg

Preached by Rev Canon Geoff Read at Te Deum on Sunday 7th June 2026

Text: Colossians 1:9-17

In the recordings archive of the BBC there are thirteen wartime broadcasts to the people of Luxembourg made by Grand Duchess Charlotte from her exile in London between 1940 and 1944 - each begins Léif Lëtzebuerger and they are messages of encouragement and hope, the assurance of love and prayer, and wise advice to resist and stay true to their identity as Luxembourgers.

One in particular in September 1942, was broadcast as young men were being conscripted to the German Wehrmacht. It explored the complexity of resistance and the swearing of any oath - distinguishing between the words forced onto lips and the commitment of the heart: Your heart must remain free from what they make your lips swear - even if a man is imprisoned, enslaved and oppressed, his soul and spirit remain free.

The words we have just heard read from the Bible also come to us across the years, this time through a letter, written to the people of a church in Colossae (in today's western Turkey) and from Paul as he found himself separated from them, indeed in a prison cell.

It is a message of encouragement and hope sent to people facing imminent or actual persecution, the assurance of love and prayer and the wise advice to resist and stay true to their identity in Christ which will be the source of their inner freedom whatever circumstances may bring

That advice is rooted in an act of faith - to dare to believe that despite the experience of harsh and seemingly absolute Roman rule, that rule is in fact relative in its authority and power

Paul, from a Roman prison cell, reminds his friends in Colossae that all rule and rulers is an expression God's good and loving rule in Christ

In v16 & 17 we read that

All things in heaven and on earth including powers, thrones and rulers, have been created by him and for him

Christ is before all things, and in Him all things hold together

Order and authority are good things, gifts of God to human beings to enable our flourishing and wellbeing

How that authority is exercised and whether it is a good expression is something else - are people flourishing, is there equity, peace and justice?

We live, and human beings have always lived, in this complex thing called society, ordered in different ways at different times

But what Paul is clear about - for his readers then, and for us readers today - is that we need to frame all that we see and experience, both the good and the evil, what enables or hinders flourishing, to frame that in the light of the big picture of God's just rule and loving purposes for not just human beings but the whole created order

And that in the cross and resurrection of Jesus we have the assurance that come what may, evil and inequity does not have the last word

Not just at some point in the future, but in the freedom that gives to us in the here and now to be and to act differently

In a strange and wonderful way, here at All Saints, we seem to attract and are privileged to welcome people who give us direct and relational threads to the pain of Syria, Palestine, and Ukraine and those who act in opposition in Russia. Of eastern and southern Africa and also the pain of racial prejudice and unfairness right here in Luxembourg.

Our response, Paul reminds us, must always begin in prayer, longing to be filled first and foremost with knowledge of God's will, then seeking his strength to live differently

And, in turn, that this can be true of those in those places and situations for whom we are called to pray and also to act

Just a few weeks ago we welcomed Father Fadi, Rector of Ramallah, who spoke of the daily oppressions of life on the West Bank and his decision not to hate the Israeli soldier on the checkpoint, but the powers and authorities that create the systemic injustices that lead to the pain of all in that part of the Holy Land.

Without the strength that comes from God, we can easily slip into something very different and become part of the problem rather than God's good solution.

But with God's strength we can choose and live differently

So that, in the words of Grand Duchess Charlotte: Your heart must remain free from what they make your lips swear - (so that) even if a man is imprisoned, enslaved and oppressed, his soul and spirit (can) remain free.