

Freedom - Luke 13:10-17
21st August 2016

Pray...

We are fortunate to live in a country that enjoys incredible freedom.

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, provides, in Article 19, that:

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

And we all know that in different countries different amount of freedom is allowed.

Freedom to vote, freedom of speech, freedom to choose who we marry, freedom to choose our own religion, freedom of the press...

The list goes on and we are incredibly fortunate to live in Britain with the incredible freedom we have

And so you might wonder why I am choosing to talk about freedom this morning.

Well - I think this passage has a lot to teach us, and to challenge us, about spiritual freedom rather than the political freedom I have just been highlighting.

Jesus said

'You are set FREE from your ailment' Vs 12

'Ought not this woman be set FREE...? Vs 16

I'd like us to think about what Jesus, the woman and the Pharisees each have to teach us about spiritual freedom.

Jesus

Jesus was teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath

He knew the rules and regulations regarding the Sabbath

Back at the time of the Exodus, when God gave His chosen people - the Israelites - the 10 commandments as part of their guide to live by, the 4th commandment was to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.

Jesus knew the law and here He is, apparently flouting it, by healing a woman on the Sabbath.

But Jesus knew His calling and His purpose.

Earlier in Luke 4, we read

Jesus unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

"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."

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

When we know our calling, when we know what it is God expects from us, we experience a freedom. It is easier to know what to say yes and no to because we know what we are called to

Do you know what God has called you to?

For all of us we have the command to Love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and to love our neighbour as ourselves

But do you have another, personal call

Just briefly, I will tell you something of mine because it comes from Isaiah 58, the Old Testament Passage we have read this morning.

Several years ago I had a recurring dream that I remembered. Only for a few a few nights but it was very clear

I was in an area where there were lots of grey block of flats

And there was a lot of fighting going on. Gun fire and shelling

And I was busy moving around, avoiding the gun fire, and taking people to safety

A few months after that, when I was asking God about where He was leading me and what He wanted me to do, someone was praying for me and had the verses from Is 58 especially vs 12 'You shall be called the breach -(repairer of Broken Walls), Restorer of streets to live in - (streets with dwellings)

I then remembered my dream and understood the Gun fire and shelling to represent the Spiritual Battle that goes on around us, of which we are often largely unaware, and understood God's calling on my life to be ministering in towns and cities, rather than in rural ministry

And so that has given me a freedom when I have been looking for jobs & places to serve Him

Knowing who we are In Christ and knowing our calling and purpose for Him gives us a freedom and confidence with which to serve

So Jesus, even though He knew the 'rules' of the Sabbath, knew too His calling and purpose
to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free

And so He had the confidence and freedom to speak healing to the woman, to set her free from her oppressive ailment, even though the Pharisees objected

The Woman

The woman in the story, we are told, appeared in the synagogue just as Jesus was teaching
We know that, due to a spirit, she had been crippled for 18 years, bent over and unable to stand up straight.

Imagine that for a moment... being permanently bent double, unable to straighten you back, only able to see the dirt and the dust, unable to look up

It seems she had become accustomed to her condition and its implications.

She did not approach Jesus and ask anything of Him. Nor did anyone else on her behalf

Jesus saw her and called her over

He then told her 'You are set free from your ailment'

Then laid hands on her

Take note of what happened..... She immediately stood up straight

She could immediately see straight ahead and up above her

Her sight was no longer restricted to the mud and dust of the floor, to peoples feet and ankles

No - now she could look up, she could look people in the eye, she could see the sun rather than just the light and shadows

And she began praising God

Jesus set the woman free from her ailment

She then had a new freedom physically - she could see her world in a new way

And she seemed to have a new freedom spiritually because she began praising God

Are there things in your life that you have become accustomed to that restrict your freedom?

If Jesus were to call you today would you hear Him call? And would you respond as the woman did

I am very aware that the whole topic of healing is a complicated one and one which can cause disappointment and confusion and maybe at some time we can study that a bit more

But it is so easy to become accustomed to things in our lives which stop us from standing up straight and stop us praising God.

Jesus wants to set us free from things that prevent us from standing up straight and praising God

Leader of the Synagogue

And now we come to the leader of the synagogue.

The 'leader of the synagogue' was an official appointed by the elders to look after the building, its contents, and its arrangements for worship. It is the ruler who was outraged about the disturbance caused when Jesus healed a crippled woman on a Sabbath.

As the leader of the synagogue, he was expected to maintain order and oversee that everything was done properly and according to the 'rules'. But the rules and regulations had developed into a system of power and control which led to an oppressive system that benefitted the leaders and overseers rather than enabling worship.

The reading says that 'the leader of the synagogue was indignant because Jesus had cured on the Sabbath'.

And look what he does with his indignation. He does not challenge Jesus - the one responsible for 'breaking the rules'. Instead he says to the crowd 'there are 6 days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the Sabbath day' Vs 14

Lets look at what God says through the prophet Isaiah - If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing *finger*...if you satisfy the needs of the afflicted, THEN your light shall rise in the darkness.

And in the rest of the Isaiah reading the Lord is warning his people to refrain from trampling the Sabbath, to refrain from pursuing their own interests on his holy day, because the Sabbath is for delighting in the Lord and honouring Him.

And Jesus is saying the same thing. He reprimands the leader for using the rules to suit his own needs. The leader will untie his donkey and give it water on the Sabbath, but then complain and rebuke the people when the woman is 'untied' from the affliction that has kept her bound up for 18 years. The leader is too busy pointing the finger and upholding the law to the point of oppression which totally defeats the point of keeping the Sabbath day holy. The day when the Jewish people were to remember, honour and worship their God who had led them out of slavery and into freedom.

For Jesus the care of human beings was and is a virtue that takes precedence over rites and rituals.

Don't we too sometimes have a tendency to get caught up in the rituals and rules of worship, often man made rather than delighting in the Lord and all He has done for us.

How often do we truly delight in the Lord?

I wonder what is MOST IMPORTANT to you about our worship together on a Sunday morning?

I don't want anyone to answer that now but think and pray about it this coming week

Is it the music - our singing together?

Is it the coming together as community?

Is it the sermon? As long as it is not more than 10 minutes long? :-)

Is it the sharing of bread and wine, remembering what Christ did for us on the cross?

Is it the time of fellowship together over coffee after the formal part of the service?

Is it the words of the liturgy that we say week by week?

Is it? It could be all sorts of things.

I would love to know from you over the next week or so, what it is that is really important to you in worship together. And it will be different things for different people

If we are really honest with ourselves, is it sometimes other things that become most important to us? Do, sometimes, the rituals and traditions become more important than our true worship of our loving, compassionate and freeing God?

Let me give you just one example to get you thinking.

We have 3 fantastic vergers. They each do a brilliant job of serving all of us in preparing for our services; being here early, ensuring that everything is in the right place at the right time, helping the flow of communion, clearing away afterward a service and often being in church at some point during the week to ensure that everything is in order.

Without them my life would be much much harder and our worship together would not flow nearly as smoothly.

THANK YOU Brian and Brenda and Chris

But why do they lead us as we process into church at the beginning of a service and then out again at the end?

In years gone by, before pews were in churches - yes there was a time! :-)) and the congregation was less ordered, the verger would lead the procession into church to clear a pathway for those involved in leading the worship.

Today we don't have that same practical need

But we still have our vergers lead us into church?

Why? Is it something we just do because we have always done it that way? Or does it actually enable us to worship freely and enhance our worship?

I just use that as an example to make us think about what it is that we actually hold as most important in our worship together.

Is it to delight in our Lord and to worship Him with freedom in Spirit and in truth?

Or is it to maintain some of the rituals and traditions ?

I am not advocating that we ditch everything we do and have a free for all. NOT AT ALL!

Don't panic !!

But I do think it is good for each of us to just stop and ask ourselves

Are we pursuing our own interests on God's holy day or are free from bondage and delighting in the Lord when we come together for worship?

Jesus operates under grace, offering us freedom from condemnation and firm hope in Him

Conclusion

Jesus knew His calling and His purpose and so He was free to speak healing to the woman, even though it upset the leader of the synagogue who was trying to uphold the law as he perceived it ? Are you confident of your calling and purpose as children of God to love Him and your neighbours and worship Him accordingly? Or do you need to ask Him to show you His purpose?

Are you like the woman, who has become accustomed to her condition and so not able to stand up straight and praise God in freedom? Is He calling you to Himself this morning to be set free from whatever it is that is keeping you tied up instead of being free in Him?

Are you like the leader of the synagogue, keeping the rules whether man made or God made, so that the rules and traditions have become more important and more dominant rather than delighting in God and worshipping Him freely?

Paul wrote to the Galatians that 'it is for freedom that Christ has set us free... do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery' (Gal 5:1)

I pray that we will all be set free from anything that binds us and stops us from being truly free, so that we can stand up straight, delight in the Lord, and praise Him, who lived and died and rose again so that we might be free indeed. Amen