

Readings: Galatians 5:1, 13-25 & Luke 9:51-end

Opening Prayer:

Lord, teach us how to live out our freedom in you in the unceasing flow of your love. To your glory. Amen.

Let me ask you a question. Why are we here today? Why? What would you say? You probably have lots of good answers!

When Jesus said 'Come and follow me!' he probably didn't mean that it was just to sit in Church for an hour on a Sunday. Good though worshipping together is, there has to be more to being a disciple of Christ.

I was brought up in a Christian family and church attendance has always been a part of my life. But I can remember longing to know God for myself, not just the wonderful stories of faith I heard from family and at Church.

So it was an amazing moment for me to have it all fall into place halfway up a Mountain in the Trossachs when I was twelve: to know that I was deliberately created by a loving God who'd also made the wonderful planet I lived on and all the people on it. And I knew I was held in God's love, I knew with certainty that Jesus called me to follow him, and I knew it was all about something bigger than me, a love vast beyond imagining, and a purpose that God already was busy with.

Purpose....not just faith and belief, then. Ah...perhaps we need to be re-reading the epistle of James! Later....

Another question. Do you ever rant at the TV? It's a bad habit, but as I get older I do it more. Last Sunday I caught a discussion on the government's plans to deal with asylum seekers by tagging them or shipping them off to Rwanda.

Now I'm not going to get into party politics here (heaven forfend!) but the representative of the Government think tank was vitriolic about the Archbishops' letter condemning the schemes. The faith communities claim, she said, that they have God on their side in this...how dare they! Their aim, according to her, was to polarise discussion, and stop proper debate. No wonder I ranted!

But the Bishop and the senior Rabbi who were also part of the discussion kept admirably calm. Each of them talked about how faith demands they engage with hard questions and with injustice, or what is the point of having faith at all?

St Paul write: *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.*

Freedom to speak truth to power, whoever that power is, whatever the inconvenient truth might be. And that is demanding. It's hard. It can make us deeply unpopular and perhaps a bit of an embarrassment.

But I'd rather be unpopular and embarrassing than irrelevant, wouldn't you?

Remember the woman who broke the alabaster jar of oil and poured all of it over Jesus'? There was outrage and shouting. But Jesus knew she had done the right thing...and the inconvenient truth was that she had anointed him for the death he was to face in a short time.

I recently dug out an old cd to take with us on holiday for those long car journeys, and I had forgotten how much I enjoy Phil Baggley's song writing. These lines are from *Resurrection* :

How easily we forget

The grace with which we started

How quickly we become

Tied up and locked away

Bound by our own frustrations

Till all our senses numb.

It's so easy to forget we are free, to just feel so bruised and weary that we wonder if we are any asset to the Lord at all. It's easy to slip in to sitting quietly on the side-lines and letting the world go to hell in a handcart as it seems determined to do because it's all too big, too complicated and what difference could I make, anyway?

But that's not why Jesus calls into freedom. He calls us to shape the relationships we make and societies we live in along kingdom lines...the kingdom of God with it's building blocks of forgiveness; second and seventieth chances; love, justice, peace and fairness.

He calls us to be the bearers of good fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Not sniping at one another, nor asking for fire from heaven to destroy silly, prejudiced Samaritans who can only see one way of thinking or believing.

So while it's NOT about RANTING to the structures that need to change, it's about speaking truth...hard truth...inconvenient truth...with courage and conviction, bringing all the fruit of the Spirit that grows within us into the mix, too.

A famous architect once said:

First we shape our environment by what we build...then the environment shapes us.

I think this is an extremely helpful thought because it sheds light on the immensity of our responsibility. We Christians are builders of environment along kingdom lines. It is God's kingdom that needs to shape us and our fellow human beings, because God's kingdom is based on good foundations and life enhancing principles.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Our freedom, the freedom of others, the good of those around us.

To put it another way... each of us is to be a blessing to those around us.

But that involves us in action, in discussion, in welcoming and nurturing. We need to pray because we so require the energy and the power of the Spirit at work in us.

So why are we here, together, in Church today? To learn more about God's gifts of love and forgiveness and the reality of resurrection power to change history.

And it may turn out that in our encounter with God here in Church or in the privacy of our own quiet space at home, we find that though God's love is vast beyond all measure, and nothing we do can ever stop him loving us, our FREEDOM in God's love is all about being free to live the right way, do the right things, say words that kindle joy, not kill it.

It's a mistake to think that freedom in Christ is to have carte blanche to do what we like because we can always say sorry and God will forgive. No.

We are still accountable and will be encouraged, guided, admonished, scolded and sometimes thrust along right paths of behaviour. That's the Spirit's work!

Our world is suffering, broken, burning itself to oblivion. Our world needs us to stand up, show up, open our arms in welcome and our hands in healing. We need to gird ourselves with the Spirit's courage and speak truth to power.

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, I want to be here, but I want be more. I want to be your follower 24/7. Help me to shake off indifference and build your kingdom here, now. Help me to be courageous.

Holy Spirit, start with me.

Amen.

And I'll conclude with more from Phil Baggley:

If someone could bring alive

All our brave tomorrows

And roll the stone away

To let us live this life

For this is time we borrow

Don't let it slip away...

It's time for resurrection

It's time for letting go

Of all the things that might have been

For living out our promises

And dusting off our dreams

Time for us to fly again

Time for resurrection.

Quotations from the song 'Resurrection' by Phil Baggley

from the 'Leaving Safe Anchorage' album by The Harbour Lights, ©Daybreak Music.

CCLI 191688