

Reflections • Wednesday 10 July 2019 • By Bishop Cam Venables

## The 'freedom' to choose



When I was at primary school all the students and staff would gather in the hall for assembly each week. In the same hall we would also do gymnastics, choir, and musical productions. So, there were climbing ropes hanging from the ceiling, gym mats stacked in a corner, and a well-used piano next to the door. At assembly, the piano was played by a teacher called 'Miss Lawrence' and she must have had some favourite hymns because I am word perfect on a couple simply because we sang them so often!

The last verse of one hymn has these lyrics, "Let faith be my shield and let joy be my steed, 'gainst the dragons of anger, the ogres of greed; and let me set free, with the sword of my youth, from the castle of darkness the power of truth." The words are pretty dated, but most of us loved singing that song, and I do not think it is because we particularly wanted to kill dragons and ogres! I think it is because we wanted to be part of setting truth free, however ten year olds understand 'truth' and 'freedom'?

The term 'freedom' seems to have been used quite a bit recently in the media, with particular reference to 'religious freedom' in Australia, and 'political freedom' in Hong Kong. Broadly speaking we might agree that 'freedom' allows for choices to be made, and that when freedom is absent people may feel trapped, enslaved or captive.

In what is sometimes called the 'Nazareth Manifesto' Jesus quoted Isaiah and 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." ([Luke 4.18-19](#)). In choosing to read this he affirmed that releasing the captives and letting the oppressed go free were core business for him, and surely by implication...for us also.

The Baptist pastor, Martin Luther King Jr, was inspired by this and brought it as a focus to the American civil rights movement. In the conclusion of his famous 'I have a dream' speech, delivered in 1963, he affirmed that, "When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, 'Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!'"

So, anybody who thinks that politics and religion should remain separate have not taken seriously the clear focus on freedom that is articulated in much Biblical writing!

But, there are many kinds of bondage which deny people freedom. Poverty is a form of bondage where people struggle to find shelter, food, and community. Addiction is a form of bondage where the most important thing in life becomes that which satisfies the given physiological and psychological craving. There can be addiction to drugs and alcohol; addiction to gambling; addiction to work; addiction to computer gaming and Netflix; addiction to approval; addiction to buying things; addiction to exercise... Incredibly, the human brain seems to have the capacity to become addicted to just about anything, and through such addictions we can find ourselves trapped, enslaved, and captive. What might Christian faith have to say about such things?

St Paul suggests in his letter to the Galatians that 'For freedom Christ has set us free!' ([Galatians 5.1](#)), and in this I think he was talking about freedom from the destructive inclinations that can trap and enslave, and make our lives, and those of our loved ones, miserable.

I am going to paraphrase because some of the language he used is old fashioned! I think he is saying that when we think sex is the most important thing in life, and we repeatedly use people without giving anything back, we are going to end up lonely and emotionally bankrupt! And, when we think that possessions and social status are the more important things in life, we are going to find ourselves lonely and wondering where we went wrong! And, when we allow ourselves to be consumed by jealousy, cynicism, and telling lies...eventually, it will end in tears!

Then Paul suggests that the way to live a healthy, fulfilling, and liberated life, is to allow the Spirit of God to grow within our character love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control ([Galatians 5.22-23](#)). Now you might be thinking, "Hold on, Cam! I'm just not a patient person!" Or, "I get angry easily, and that's just the way I am!"

These are understandable responses, but Paul seems to be suggesting that our character is not set in concrete – that we are all works in progress, and we can each choose to change and grow.

What do you reckon?

**Sunday Devotions • Friday 12 July 2019 • By The Rev'd Michael Uptin**

## **Sunday Devotion: 21 July 2019, Sixth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Main readings:** [Amos 8.1-12](#); [Psalm 52](#); [Colossians 1.15-29](#); [Luke 10.38-42](#)

**Supplementary readings:** [Psalm 80](#); [Colossians 3.12-17](#); [Amos 9.5-15](#); [Psalm 15](#); [Luke 10.17-24](#)

"... all things have been created through him and for him." ([Colossians 1.16b](#))

The other day I noticed a quote from Jesus on the bottom of my desk calendar. It was taken from the Sermon on the Mount. It got me thinking whether, for many people, this was the extent of their picture of Jesus – a wise teacher who came out with some pithy life guidance on a regular basis.

This scripture from Colossians paints a very different picture. No matter how far NASA wants to travel, or where we as humans think we can inhabit the earth, or how far astrophysicists can see into the universe, or what new planet or moon or galaxy is found, it was all created through him.

The intricate way in which this planet and this universe hold together is tied back to Jesus. The balance of life on this earth rests in him and on him.

So, how big is your Jesus? Have you domesticated him to the bottom of a day planner? Have you reduced him to be a good moral teacher? Let us open our eyes to see the real Jesus and open our hearts to be in awe of him and worship him.