

Called to freedom

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at FBC on Pentecost Sunday June 20th 2025 – Galatians 5:1, 13-25)

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Freedom is the oxygen of the soul said Moshe Dayan. Rosa Parks who famously refused to give up her seat on the bus during the American Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's said – I would like to be remembered as a person who wanted to be free ... so other people would also be free.

Freedom, liberty, liberation, emancipation, release. What do you think of when you think of freedom.

I find myself looking to the sky and the birds. For many years I have loved watching pelicans fly. This seems to me to be such an extraordinary example of freedom. Here we have a very odd shaped bird – large, both an enormous beak and belly and somehow it manages to get up into the sky and glide, that to me is a picture of freedom. Perhaps for you, freedom is symbolised in a child running and giggling, or maybe a pod of whales frolicking in the ocean.

We don't have to look very far in our world to see that people are not free. War and conflict curtail the freedom of others – just look at Gaza in the last 18 months, people told to move from place to place to avoid being killed in bombing attacks, people lining up to receive food, or worse still, blockades stopping humanitarian aid from getting through. Hunger and ill health do not make for freedom.

I came across this quote from an Iranian author the other day 'I was born in an Iranian prison. My parents were held in their jails. My uncles lie in their mass graves. Nothing you can tell me about the crimes of the Iranian regime that I haven't lived in blood and bone. That doesn't mean I want my people bombed, maimed, killed, their homes in ruins. If your vision of liberation comes only through the destruction of innocent lives, then it's not freedom you're after.'¹ Sobering.

World politics at the moment seems to not be about freedom – the leader of the 'free' world seems to be telling other countries how much they must spend on defence, or what kind of laws they can make, if they don't agree, he will place tariffs on their produce, so much for free trade!

It is not that long since slavery was abolished in western countries, but we still see it in the world.

Closer to home our freedom is curtailed by clocks and culture. Computers and the online world entrap us rather than free us. Our countries rules for asylum seekers means these people are not free to flourish. Poverty, lack of education, addictions of all kinds all bind people too. Mental illness, dementia and fear constrict one's ability to truly live.

Paul reminds the folks in Galatia and us, that in Christ there is freedom, and it is for freedom that we are set free.

Freedom, however, comes with responsibility. For Paul and Jesus that responsibility is called love. That love can be put into action with the help of the Spirit, by living out the fruit of that spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness,

¹ Quote by Sahar Delijani, Iranian Author – found on Facebook on June 26, 2025.

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gentleness and self-control. These fruits are not illegal, against the law, in fact they are the way in which to usher in freedom to the world.

When you take the hand of a dishevelled and **unlovable** man and lead him to a place to sit, you are bringing freedom.

When you share the **joy** of an addict who has been clean for a few days or weeks, months or years, you are bringing freedom.

When you sit someone down and speak **calmly** to them and help them put a lid on their anger, you are bringing freedom.

When you listen **patiently** through the tears of a woman sharing her experience of domestic violence you are bringing freedom.

When you **kindly** pour someone a cup of tea and offer them a biscuit, you are bringing freedom.

When you **generously** donate to a charity, you are bringing freedom.

When you **faithfully** pray for others, for peace, you are bringing freedom.

When you **gently** embrace someone grieving a loss of some kind, you are bringing freedom.

When you **put in box** your fears, your prejudices and your judgement as you listen to another, you are bringing freedom.

Whenever you practice the love of God, you are not only bringing freedom to others but also to yourself. It is here that labels fall away. It is here that people begin to flourish. It is here where true relationships begin to form. It is here that people can be their true selves. It is here people are liberated from that which holds them captive.

We cannot bomb our way to freedom despite what our politicians would have us believe. Unless of course those bombs are full of love, generosity, kindness. The only bombs that will bring freedom will be ones of food, medicine, clean water, shelter and clothing. These will bring dignity. The other bombs will only induce hate and more hate.

At the conference I attended during the week, the guest speaker John Swinton² who is a theologian with a background of working with people who live with dementia or mental illness suggests the following, which I think perhaps sums up what I have been trying to say. He suggests that the best way to minister to another and therefore bring them relief and freedom from that which disturbs them is to:

1. Listen differently
2. Speak truthfully
3. Love relentlessly

Paul tells us that we are free for freedom. Our freedom in Christ is given so that we might bring freedom to others. It is freedom for not freedom from.

² John Swinton at the Spiritual Care Australia conference, June 2025.

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When we live the fruit of the Spirit, when we practice these gifts of the Spirit that we have been given, we will bring freedom to others and in so doing we just might find freedom comes full circle and we too will experience freedom, we will be free to be ourselves.

In his speech 'I have a dream', Martin Luther King Jr, envisages a future where one can say: Free at last, Free at last, Thank God almighty we are free at last.³

We are called to freedom. We are free in Christ for freedom. Let's live it. Amen.

³ 'I have a dream' speech by Martin Luther King Jr.