

## **'Freedom' John 1:29-42** St Matthias 15/1/17

### *1030 Communion service John Beckett*

Are you free? Have you been set free? Or do you feel that you are like Nelson Mandela trapped in a small prison cell on Robin Island dreaming of being free, but feeling that even if anything ever changes it will be a Long walk to Freedom.

Today I want to bring you good news.

That the door to your cell is wide open. Jesus came to set us free. And as he says "if the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed". But are you?

The first chapter of John's gospel is an extraordinary piece of writing, pointing to, witnessing about who Jesus is.

Today's reading draws so many streams of biblical thought together such that in the last 21 verses of this chapter (only 13 of which we've heard today) John tells us about Jesus who is:

**the anointed one, the Messiah or Christ.**

he is also the one who does the anointing, who **baptises with the Holy Spirit**

He is the **son of God; teacher or rabbi; the King of Israel; the Son of Man**

And particularly today in verse 29:

**Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!**

**It's so important that it is repeated in verse 36:**

**Look, the Lamb of God!**

Have you ever noticed the 'Lamb of God' window in the church? (it's the very top left side of the large west window)

But why does Jesus being called the lamb help at all?

Throughout the Bible, the shedding of the blood of an unblemished animal in sacrifice, giving up it's life-force, enables the breakdown of relationship with God that sin has caused to be restored.

It isn't very easy for us to understand it, but the Bible is clear –God values that sacrifice and so it is effective.

And there are two ways that Jesus is seen as the Lamb of God:

The first is his identification with the Passover lamb in Exodus. Do you remember?

The awful night for the Egyptians as their first born died, while the Israelites who had blood from the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb on the doorposts and lintels of their homes all survived. And how in the fear and shock at their loss, the Egyptians finally set God's people free.

St Paul talks about Jesus, as the Passover lamb

And of course, Jesus does himself at his last Passover meal: *this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for **many**.*

**Jesus is related to the Passover Lamb and to Freedom.** But there's another way that animals, including lambs were used in sacrifice. Luke and Peter make the link, but it is St John who particularly emphasizes this aspect in his writings:

On the Jewish day of atonement the blood of the animal was sprinkled over the most holy place in the Temple to provide for **forgiveness** for God's people: to provide for reconciliation, for atonement: at one ment.

So in John's Revelation Jesus the Lamb takes up his place at the throne of God.

And here is what John says in 1 John 2:2

*<sup>2</sup> He, Jesus, is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.*

So when we take wine and bread at holy Communion, symbols of the sacrificial lamb, symbols of freedom and forgiveness

**Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.**

Look, behold, see, open your eyes to who this is!

see what he does: he comes to take away the sin of the world – that includes your sin!.

And it's forgiveness, but it's more than forgiveness! He comes to bear them away, so that they no longer need have any effect on us whatsoever.

Jesus is the one through whom God's promise in Psalm 103 comes true: *as far as the east is from the West, so far as he removed our transgressions from us.*

When we look to Jesus on the cross in sorrow for our sins, and are assured of our forgiveness,

- why are we often so dour about it?
- Why are our faces not lit up with deep joy more often?
- Why are we not dancing and celebrating and singing?
- Why so reserved to witness that the Lamb of God has taken away our sins ?

It is as if we see that the door to freedom is open but we often do not seem to step through it?

6 or 7 possible reasons:

- 1 maybe we have never appreciated the prison that we are in. Maybe we cannot see the way in which our sinfulness binds us as it did our volunteer earlier?
- 2 Maybe you think that no one, not even God could forgive the things you have done wrong? Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world – the whole world.
- 3 Sometimes we cannot be free because we refuse to forgive someone else. This is a really tough one but it lies at the heart of the Gospel.

We pray every week or day: forgive us our sins **as** we forgive those who sin against us. It's not that God's forgiveness is conditional in that way, it is just that we cannot receive forgiveness if we withhold forgiveness because we remain trapped ourselves.

Just two weeks ago Jill Seward very sadly died of a stroke. Rightly or wrongly she is remembered by the public mostly for having to endure a brutal attack in 1986 at the Ealing vicarage where she lived. Her father Michael, and boyfriend were beaten senseless with a cricket bat and she herself was raped by two of her attackers. Thankfully, she is also remembered, as a Christian, for saying things like this:

*"of course, sometimes I thought it might be quite nice to be full of hatred and revenge. But I think it creates a barrier and you are the one who gets damaged in the end. So although it makes you vulnerable, forgiving is actually a release..."*

This may be hugely challenging for you if you are someone who has been hurt badly too, and harder still maybe is that Jill also says *"it's not whether you can or can't forgive, it's whether you will or won't."*

But it isn't just withholding forgiveness towards other people that can keep us bound and not free

writer David Runcorn reminds us that sometimes we need to forgive God, that Earth is not like heaven.

Often it can be as difficult to forgive ourselves.

**4** part of that lack of ability to forgive ourselves is also tangled up with our inability to escape the battle of living in regret. "If only I had done something different" .

Who here knows that pang of regret at having chosen the wrong golf club, or the wrong dessert at a restaurant? Or know the more serious problem of being stuck in the past because of a really bad choice that we have made?

But by the grace of God, not only can we receive his forgiveness but we can also be set free to live God's new life for us.

He is more like Dale, our new American Sat Nav voice, than you might think. Dale never shouts at me. He never says you're too late...There's no hope for you now buddy...he simply says turn

around and then keeps giving me directions to get back on track to reach the destination.

As St Paul says in Phil 3:

*But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.*

God opens the door of our cell when he forgives us, let's choose to walk out and be free.

5 Sometimes, we listen too much to the Deceiver, Satan, who St John also names "the accuser".

When we come to confess our sins in church, we can be reminded of some sin from the past that we know has been dealt with, that we have known the joy of forgiveness from, and yet still we hear his accusing, irritating, annoying voice. Just remind Satan:

**The Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world.**

6 maybe we don't want to be free after all.

Look at my lovely old barbour coat. It is true that the zip no longer works so I have to step in and out of it. The inside lining is torn to pieces. And unless it has another coat of wax it is highly unlikely to still be waterproof. And yet cannot throw it away!

I wonder whether sometimes we don't want to be free because we would rather be able to hold on to and nurse the grudges that we have against other people. Sometimes we would rather still be able to stay grumpy or impatient or angry or rude.

**Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He takes it away to give us freedom and to invite us to be transformed, changed by God's joy!**

7 Finally, maybe we are not fully free because we have fundamentally misunderstood the nature of our sinfulness. We have seen our sins as relatively small things that we say or do that are wrong without seeing that our fundamental sin is to try to live our

lives on our own and in our own way without accepting and choosing to live the life that God has in store for us.

So this morning I want to invite you to do serious business with God:

Do you know how trapped you are?

And do you want to be free?

Runcorn writes:

*"...there is hope for sinners. Right there, in our failure and guilt, we may discover the most unexpected gift of all – the mercy, forgiveness and friendship of God. ...Only those who have reached the limit of themselves, with nothing to offer in their own defence, fall into the abyss of love. In fact only sinners understand the gospel. It is not available to anyone else."*

Will you choose to accept that the blood of the Lamb of God satisfies God's justice and that it does indeed **take away** the sins of the world – **including yours**? So that the accuser's voice carries no power over you?

Will you choose to forgive those who have hurt you? And if that is too big a step to take in one go, will you choose to begin to forgive those who have hurt you?

Will you choose to forgive yourself? Will you choose to not dwell on past regrets.

Don't make it a long walk to freedom, step through the door of the cell that you have been in and entrust yourself to God's new future for you.

Receive his joy, his forgiveness, his love through a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit from Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world

And will you be like St John and witness to one another and to the world by the way you live in the freedom that you know because of Jesus?