

Freedom...a huge responsibility

A man was brought to Mercy Hospital, and taken quickly in for coronary surgery. The operation went well and, as the groggy man regained consciousness, he was reassured by a Sister of Mercy who was waiting by his bed. "Mr. Smith, you're going to be just fine," said the nun, gently patting his hand. "We do need to know, however, how you intend to pay for your stay here. Are you covered by insurance?" "No, sorry, I don't have any insurance," the man whispered hoarsely. "Can you pay in cash?" persisted the nun. "I'm afraid I cannot, Sister." "Well, do you have any close relatives?" the nun essayed. "Just my sister in New Mexico," he volunteered. "But she's a humble spinster nun." "Oh, I must correct you, Mr. Smith. Nuns are not spinsters; they are married to God." "Wonderful," said Smith. "In that case, please send the bill to my brother-in-law."

Paul spends quite a lot of breath to explain what it means to have freedom in Christ. Even so, it is not easy to get our minds around it. It helps to think back on the lessons we have recently heard from Luke: Jesus heals – raising people from the dead, forgiving, and exorcising demons. Healing frees us to have the freedom to hope, gives us the capacity for joy, and opens us to the love of God.

Jesus demonstrates God's great love for us. Love is yet another thing we don't fully comprehend. Maybe because our culture has quite a few fairy tale perceptions about love. There are those who spend their lives dreaming about "the one". And that once you find "the one" amongst the billions of people on earth, you will live "happily ever after." The love you share will mean you will "never have to say you're sorry." (if you have been in any sort of relationship you know we all have to say "I'm sorry" sometime – because after all we are human.)

Fairy tale ideas cause people to spend their lives hoping for that one perfect love. But Paul tells us that the key to life is “faith working through love.”

(5.6) Paul is hinting that true fulfillment comes when we give ourselves away for others. The culture we live in counters this biblical truth by telling us not to give too much of ourselves away. It’s a paradox unless you find yourself as part of a community that is the body of Christ. The embodiment of God’s unconditional love for us allows us to lose our lives to gain the whole world. It is a connection that frees us to give of our lives in love for others.

That brings back once again to Freedom. The myth of freedom is “I can do whatever I want, whenever I want.” People get freedom confused with self-indulgence. There are always consequences to our actions and choices. Self-indulgence doesn’t result in pure freedom.

Paul says that “freedom in Christ sets us free.” Anyone can have this freedom. But it doesn’t take prisoners out of jail cells or get us out of a rotten job or relationship. This freedom is something found inside of us. It’s like falling in love with someone and discovering that person returns your love. Hearing someone say, “I choose you,” is powerful and humbling all at the same time. Nothing changes on the outside but inside we have a feeling of acceptance and warmth. Our perspective on life changes so that we have a more positive outlook. Knowing someone we love is by our side gives us strength we didn’t know we had. There is freedom in that sort of

love, and with it comes great responsibility. Because now your happiness, your life, depends upon the happiness and life of the other.

In his living, in his sacrifice, Jesus has said, “I choose you.” It is powerful and humbling to know that God loves us this much. We are accepted and through the Spirit are given a strength we could never imagine. [Paul] tells us: “I continue to say this, keep on walking by the spirit and by no means make the desires of the flesh your goal.” “He believes that [we] can distinguish between the values of a world seen through and by the Spirit and one that is not.” (Henrich)

In a nutshell this means as people of faith we recognize that we live in a world belonging to God. Frederick Buechner explains freedom this way: ‘The old prayer speaks of God “in whose service is perfect freedom.” The paradox is not as opaque as it sounds. It means that to obey Love itself, who above all else wishes us well, leaves us the freedom to be the best and gladdest that we have it in us to become.’ (p. 34)

“St. Augustine said it this way: ‘love, and do what you will.’ I think he was saying that if you truly love God and truly love others, then you are free to do whatever you want, because what you want will be—in so far as it is humanly possible—an expression of love toward God and others. And as Paul said it, there is no law against that (Gal. 5:23)! (Brehm)

“This power, God’s own Spirit, has become available to women and men alike, to slave and free, Jew and Greek as we saw in the reading from last week. It is this new life that Paul urges [us] to claim. Do not look back to a world where supervision was necessary because we could not walk by the Spirit. Embrace your freedom to reject those values and ways. Live for one another, as God has lived for you.” (Henrich)

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Rev. Alan Brehm at *Waking Dreamer* (thewakingdreamer.blogspot.com)

Frederich Buechner, *Wishful Thinking*.

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