

## Finding true Freedom

### John 8:21-36

Within our 645 evening service  
 we have a handful of young people who have just finished year twelve  
 and are enjoying that glorious summer holiday  
 between school and the rest of their lives.

I still remember what I did the day after I finished my HSC. There were four of us  
 who went out to play golf at the Beverley Park course in the St George area  
 And I remember my friend Scott  
 standing on the 10<sup>th</sup> tee wiggling his club about as prepared to tee off  
 And all of a sudden he stood up straight, turned around and asked us  
 "Do you guys remember anything?  
 Do you remember any formulas from maths,  
 do you remember any quotes from our English texts?"  
 And we looked at each other and said "Nope!"  
 and he said "Neither do I!" and he turned back to his ball, called out "Fore!"  
 and smacked it down the middle of the fairway!

It was a wonderful moment when we realized that the ties had been loosened!  
 No more uniforms, no more classes, no more homework, no more exams! Freedom!  
 What a great feeling!

And maybe you've had similar experiences at different points through out *your* life,  
 Retirement! No more 9-5, or 8-6 as is often the case.  
 When the kids move out of home! That may still be in the future for you!  
 When the credit card is paid off or the loan repaid, you feel released!

It's a great feeling, and what we hear in today's passage  
 is that Jesus wants to provide us with an experience of freedom;  
 The joy of having chains loosened is something that Jesus wants to deliver.

This morning we continue with our series on John 7-8,  
 two chapters where Jesus is engaging  
 with those who are skeptical of what he is teaching.  
 In the verses we are looking at today, Jesus switches from defense to offence;  
 he has a word to those who are on side.  
 We pick things up in Ch 8:31  
 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my  
 disciples. <sup>32</sup> Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

When I was out playing golf with my friends as an 18 year old,  
 we celebrated the fact  
 that we were no longer required to remember anything!  
 Freedom for us was forgetfulness.

But freedom according to Jesus doesn't consist of forgetfulness,  
rather it involves the very opposite; it means holding on to what we've learnt.

Jesus suggests the effect of holding on to his teaching is threefold.

First of all, it's the mark of a true disciple

If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.

What are the distinguishing marks of a Christian?

Is it the fact that you own a baptism certificate?

Is it the fact that members of your family were church-goers in years past?

Is it the fact that when your children were enrolled in school

you ticked the box to send them to scripture?

Some of these marks you *would* expect to see in the lives of Christians people,  
but of more importance is that you hold on to Christ's teaching,  
that you persevere with it.

I don't know if you've noticed but there is a new guru doing the rounds,  
have you heard of Mari Kondo?

She's a Japanese woman who is teaching the world how to de-clutter and tidy  
up. And she's ruthless! She's become famous for asking a particular question.

For each and every item in your home you're meant to ask this question:

"Does this object spark joy?" And if the answer is *No*, then out it goes!

Now I was speaking to Jasmine about this, who is in no need of a Mari Kondo,  
(she's the chucker, I'm the hoarder)

And Jasmine said that the real test of a Mari Kondo house  
is to go back in two years time, because to keep things tidy  
you need to keep chucking; it's an ongoing philosophy.

And so it is with the teaching of Christ. It's teaching we hold on to.

Yes his salvation was once and for all time,

but the Christian life is ongoing.

When we turn to Christ

we throw out all those actions and thoughts that no longer have a place,  
and two years later we do it all again,

20 years later we do it all again, 40 years later.

It's teaching we hold on to and are always looking to apply.

Secondly, the effect of holding to Christ's teaching is that we start knowing the truth.

It was very common in Ancient times for learned figures

to have disciples whom they would teach.

We learn earlier in this gospel that John the Baptist had his own disciples,  
some of whom were transferred to Jesus.

The greek philosophers had their own pupils,

but they taught them in different ways.  
 Socrates and Plato would conduct long discussions with their students  
 in order to draw out knowledge that was sitting there, latent in the student.  
 Pythagoras had a different method, (maybe one thing you do remember!)  
 he saw his job to impart information to the student.  
 Jesus was more Pythagoras than Socrates,  
 he had the information and was passing it on.

Jesus isn't interested in leading us to discover our own truth  
 nor does he think truth has been seeded within, if only we could coax it out  
 Jesus is saying that he has the truth and we need to receive it.

And it's a truth that comes directly from heaven;  
 In next week's reading we'll hear him say in verse 38  
 I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence  
 What Jesus has for us is God's truth,  
 which means that it's timeless and universal.

There are some sceptics who may question the relevance of a book  
 that is thousands of years old.  
 They may think that it's outdated,  
 or that it needs to be complemented with more modern ways of thinking.  
 I remember speaking with one newly converted woman  
 who was absolutely shocked that ministers would spend 4 years at  
 Theological college studying the one book!

It's not the only book we studied,  
 but whatever else we *did* study  
 it was always compared to what we read in the Bible  
 because that is where we knew we would find truth.

And it's a truth worth knowing because it brings freedom;  
 this is the third effect of Christ's teaching, it's truth that will set us free.

There are different types of freedom and different ways to attain it.  
 You can fight for your freedom like the American revolutionaries did  
 against the British in the War of independence.  
 Or like William Wallace did against the English.  
 Pretty much any Mel Gibson film  
     will have him fighting for freedom in one way or another.

Or you can gain your freedom through knowledge.  
 Many of history's great medical discoveries are like this, aren't they?  
 Because of what we've discovered about immunity and anti-bodies  
 we can find freedom from diseases like smallpox and measles.  
 That's the kind of freedom that's on offer with Christ

Not freedom from disease (not immediately anyway),  
 but freedom that comes with the right information.  
 "See things my way" says Jesus,  
     "start applying what I am teaching you" says Jesus,  
     "and you will be set free."

This begs the question, "Set free from what?"

Jesus goes on to tell us. Verse 33 They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

The people Jesus is addressing need some clarification  
     as to the type of slavery he is talking about.  
 He's not talking about the type of physical slavery  
     that would result from a war or an invasion,  
 he's talking about a slavery that starts off invisible  
 but sooner or later does manifest itself in an observable way  
 and eventually has everlasting consequences.

It's interesting that the bible describes sin as a form of slavery.

If you've every seen movies depicting slavery  
 you'll understand just how dehumanizing the practice is.  
 People are reduced to items of property to be used and discarded,  
 their lives in some cases are barely worth living,  
 and a premature death is more likely to be the rule rather than the exception.

And so when we sin against God,  
 when we turn our backs on his teaching and when we go our own way,  
 inevitably we become less of who we are meant to be.  
 By going our own way we think we are encountering freedom,  
 but the reality is that we are enslaving ourselves and causing damage.

In the 1960s the sexual revolution was supposed to bring freedom,  
 but we haven't ended up in a great spot  
 with many young people ruined by pornography in particular  
     in heaps of different ways.

I also wonder whether pornography is what's behind  
 some of the horrendous headlines that we've seen in recent months,  
 with tremendous violence being inflicted upon some of our young women.

And that's just the effects of sin in this world,  
 sin also captures and holds us until God's judgment in the next.

But Jesus speaks of freedom, both now and in the world to come.  
 He speaks of believing in him so that we don't die in our sins,  
 he speaks of the gift of the Holy Spirit which makes a difference now.

There's a great missionary story from the 19<sup>th</sup> century that takes place in Jamaica. The year was 1838 and it was in that year at midnight on the 31<sup>st</sup> of July, that slavery was finally abolished. To mark the occasion a missionary by the name of William Knibb called together a crowd of 10,000 people for a great celebration. They built a huge coffin, into which the slaves threw their chains and fetters as well as all the other markers of slavery. And then as the clock started to strike, Knibb cried out "The monster is dying!" With each strike of the clock "The monster is dying!" And then on the stroke of midnight he cried out again "the monster is dead, the monster is dead, let us bury him". And they closed the coffin and lowered it into ground.

A great image of both the horror of slavery but also of the joy of finding freedom. And so it is with sin. Sin is a monster, and it needs slaying, it needs burying, And so it *was* slayed when Jesus died on the cross.

Now so far in our discussion we've been contrasting slavery with freedom, but Jesus introduces another contrast in verses 35-36, the contrast between slavery and family: Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. <sup>36</sup> So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

Households in the ancient world were large affairs, not like the smaller units we are used to today, you would have the parents and the children but also the slaves and the servants. It was the proper family members who held all the power and authority, and it was the slaves and servants who could find themselves moved on.

And so if you wanted a permanent place in the household then one of the family members had to issue you with your freedom, then you could stay on as a freed man or woman. And here Jesus is saying that as the Son of our Heavenly Father, he has the authority to establish our freedom on a *permanent basis*.

Wouldn't it be great if the freedoms we sought for ourselves were permanent? When I was released from school I found another form of slavery in the form of tertiary education. 8 years of it! There were times when I felt chained to my desk and the books. I remember thinking, "maybe this is what's its like to be in prison, just me in my room with my thoughts!" When my father retired I remember him announcing the very next day "I'm bored!", and I know others who've reached that stage think similarly. We might find that upon release the joy doesn't last.

But when Christ establishes our freedom from sin he does so forever and for good.

It might take a while to unlearn the old sinful habits

but there is no reason to retain the fear that a slave might have:

The fear of what the master might do to us,

the fear of how it might all end up.

We've gained a permanent place in the family

because the Son himself has established that place for us.

And it is a place *within a family*, so it does come with new responsibilities.

When we talk of Christian freedom

what we don't mean is the freedom to do whatever pleases us;

that's a surefire way to find ourselves back in the depths of slavery,

But what we do want

is to start pleasing and working with the members of our new family.

My mother-in-law recently bought our son a set of gardening tools,

and so when I'm out sweeping up leaves,

Theo is right along side me with his own little broom.

Now why is he willing to do that?

because he wants to be with his dad

and to work with his family and to help with what needs doing.

It will be a miracle if he's still doing that at 16,

but right now the picture is a good one!

And so this is the direction our own freedom points us in.

It's a freedom that lands us in a family along side the Son of God

as children of our Heavenly Father.

Freed from sin, yes,

but free to embrace our role as children of God.

Pray