

Freedom Sunday - Passage – Exodus 2.23 – 3.17

Opening Prayer

I wonder what makes you angry, gets under your skin and ruins your day? Usually, for me, it's the small things. Here's a quick test – Which of these makes you the angriest!

- o Someone else's atrocious driving
- o Someone pushing in front of you in a queue (COVID-19)
- o A family member in control of the TV remote

Today, we're joining with thousands of churches all around the world, devoting time to something called Freedom Sunday – taking time to consider freedom and slavery and praying and acting to see it end. Slavery happens because desperately vulnerable people are attacked by viciously violent people who think they can get away with it. For some of us the idea that slavery exists in 2020 might still be a surprise. Wasn't it abolished 200 years ago? Sadly not.. The abolitionist movement led by people like William Wilberforce that we celebrate here at St Swithin's as he was married here, did abolish Transatlantic Slavery. But The sad truth is that while that aspect of the slave trade was ended. Over 40 million women, men and children are slaves today. Some are sold for sex, some forced to work in brick kilns, quarries and fishing fleets, without pay. *All of them are abused, mistreated and subject to terrible violence.* Christians celebrate the sanctity of life that every person is created in God's image, made to have a hope and a future.. And although those who are trapped in slavery right now are unseen to us, God knows them all. By name.

[READ EXODUS 3. 1-14]

When you see (videos) slavery in India, or children abused here in the UK, what emotion stirs up in you?.Ambivalent or Angry? That's what God felt when He saw His people, the people whom He loved, trapped in slavery. We read the story in Exodus 2:23, *'The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and He remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. So, God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.'* The word concerned in the NIV doesn't quite do it justice. The New Living Translation describes it as, God knew it was time to act.. It was time to bring freedom to the entire people. And His plan to bring freedom to a whole nation started with bringing freedom to a single person: Moses. In Exodus 3, we read the story.

Moses was happily getting on with his life. He had a family and a business and was looking after his flock. Then Yahweh interrupted him. He got Moses' attention with a miracle involving a bush that burned but didn't burn up. And once He had Moses' attention, God gave him a job. He commanded Moses to go back to Pharaoh, by far the biggest slave owner of the day, and tell him to let the Israelites go free. Moses was enlisted into God's plan to bring freedom.

Do we think God is still looking for people to go to the modern-day Pharaoh's, today's slave owners and traffickers, and to say, "Let my people go!"

Moses first reaction was absolute fear and panic! Who am I? (Ex 3:11) Or maybe, God, I cannot possibly do that! Have you ever felt that when you've sensed God might be calling you to get involved? I can't possibly do that! Who am I? What can I really do to bring freedom?

Remember what God said to Moses at the burning bush: "I have indeed seen the misery of my people ... I have heard them crying ... so I have come down to rescue them ... So now go, I am sending you."

*The problem was that Moses felt completely inadequate for the task. Who am I? I think you have the wrong person if you want to make a difference. God responded to Moses in two ways. **First**, God reveals who he really is to Moses. He tells Moses His name. He invites Moses into an intimate relationship with Him. He gives Moses signs that He is with Him and He promises to go with him. The answer to an impossible task is relationship with the amazing God.*

When we say I am not up to it God replies "I AM." If we're facing challenges that are beyond us, that are beyond our power. Remember God's power is sufficient for all the challenges and evil in the world. So, maybe facing challenges beyond us will mean we stop leaning on our own strength and power, and wisdom. And starting trusting in God's!!! That's starts with prayer, will I turn to get for strength and power and come before him faithfully?.

The second way in which God responded to Moses was to give him a team. God never intends us to fight great evil on our own. He gives us community. For Moses it was his brother Aaron and the Israelite leaders. Not everyone can be the Moses, but we all can play our part, remember a few weeks ago when we looked at the two midwives Shiphrah and Puah in Exodus 1.....They open the door for this whole story of freedom. *They played their part so that freedom could come to thousands.*

So my challenge to us this morning is simple, will you start by joining me in prayer, together. To cry out to God for an end to the sweatshops and brothels, fishing ships and factories, and will you knock on the doors of Heaven to give grace and wisdom and power to those working on the frontline, the investigators, lawyers, social workers and community carers.

William Wilberforce said three things were necessary to destroy slavery: Awareness, Prayer and Money.

We, as the Church, can do something to stop the evil that values money more than human life. This morning let's join God's story of freedom to the captive, and offer up what we have, however small it may seem to you. We cannot all be Moses, but we can all make a difference, like the midwives.

In a city that has significantly benefitted from slavery, I live just along from Beckford's tower, in a church that celebrates Wilberforce, but will have had slave owners in the past, in a world where violence and oppression are still common place, and greed is a constant temptation it strikes me that we can make a real difference in seeing the freedom of God's Kingdom Come and playing our part. Let's pray

Prayer

Father God, we pray that your Kingdom would come and your will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. That your righteousness would flow like a never-ending stream. Thank You for freedom in Christ, release us and help us to release others in Jesus Name. Amen