

Leavening Methodist Church

Thought for Sunday 28th June (Steve Langton)

Recent thoughts in this series have included some discussion of slavery and freedom, and these themes crop up again in this Sunday's reading from Romans 6: 12-23. Read the whole passage, if you have the time, but here is a short excerpt:

But thanks be to God! For though at one time you were slaves to sin, you have obeyed with all your heart the truths found in the teaching you received. ¹⁸You were set free from sin and became the slaves of righteousness.

Paul makes it sound very straightforward – we were slaves to sin, but we repent and become slaves to righteousness instead. Job done. But of course it is not that simple, because the whole point of slavery is that the owner has some sort of power over the slave.

We've heard a lot of talk recently about the slaves that were taken to America before the abolition of slavery. However, slavery still exists in this country. Sian recently attended a course on modern slavery for her work and was shocked by the scale of the problem. It exists amongst the workers who pick our vegetables, amongst domestic workers, in car washes, in the sex industry and in the drugs trade.

Some of those involved are foreign, but many are British, including vulnerable young people. The common factor is that the slave owner can control them, not usually by physical restraint, by having some other form of hold on them. The slave might be an illegal immigrant scared of the authorities, they might be addicted to drugs, or they may have been threatened with reprisals against their loved ones if they escape. Escaping from modern slavery is not that easy.

The same is true of slavery to sin. Some people who come to believe in Christ do find immediate freedom from the sin that has enslaved them. Many more find it an ongoing struggle, and perhaps this is particularly true of those of us whose vices are the more pernicious, everyday weaknesses, rather than high crimes and misdemeanors. Escaping from sins of anger, selfishness or gluttony might be just as difficult, as from theft, violence or prostitution.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, recognised the struggle against sin. He believed that repentance led to justification before God, but the next stage was a life-long quest for holiness; a quest that was not so much about our own struggle to be good, but a struggle to deepen our relationship with God, so that the Holy Spirit could transform our lives.

Lord God, we pray for those trapped in slavery in this country and for those organisations working to help them. We think particularly of the Salvation Army as they provide help and support to enable the victims to leave behind those who exploited them. We also ask for your strength for all of us, for our friends, our families and our communities as we fight all that is wrong in our lives. Help us to grow in love for you, so that the transforming power of the Holy Spirit may bring us to glory. Amen.

