

40 Days of Fitness

A daily devotional by Rev Garry Hardingham

DAY 15 – God’s Grace Allows Us to Live in Freedom

For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

Romans 6:14

According to the dictionary, Freedom means “the condition or right of being able or allowed to do, say, think, etc. whatever you want to, without being controlled or limited.” We saw all of this play out during the Covid-19 lock-downs with people protesting in the streets demanding freedom.

The question is, “Freedom from what?” But, maybe the deeper question is, “Are we actually truly free?”

In his “A Treatise of Human Nature” (1740), the Scottish philosopher David Hume, considers in what way are humans free. Hume speaks of freedom (liberty) in terms of being either “spontaneous” or “indifferent”. Spontaneous freedom involves “*being able to act according to your own willings and desires, unhindered by external obstacles which might constrain or restrict that conduct (e.g., the walls or bars of a prison)*”.

Freedom of indifference is the option to choose between opposites in a given situation, but also dictates that every person should have the absolute liberty to do whatever they want unless it hurts someone else or infringes on someone else’s freedom.

The problem with both spontaneous and indifferent freedom is that have no morality. That is, it is totally up to the individual to choose. In his writing, “On Liberty” (1859), John Stuart Mill argues that “*over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.*” The problem with all this freedom is that it also includes the freedom for self-destruction. Mill’s views have filtered down to the common culture of the Western world. The advocacy of abortion, physician-assisted suicide, and sexual orientation (as in “I identify as...”) are all instances of Mill’s individualism.

But there is another freedom; the freedom for excellence. This freedom seeks to know the true nature of happiness and to distinguish it from passing pleasure or self-destructive choices. The individual can study and reflect upon human experience to learn from those who have found true happiness. Upon finding it, that person can experience liberation from the need to seek happiness in destructive ways.

Freedom for excellence is, essentially, teleological. That is, it is freedom that resides in the belief in the purposeful development toward an end, as in history. It supposes that individuals are not the centre of their own universe, but part of something other than themselves. And for Christians, this is a universe commanded by God who has been revealed in the person of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And this is the freedom that God’s Grace affords us.

Happiness is not found in liberty—that is, in the freedom to do as pleasure dictates—but liberty is found in happiness. Or, as the ancient Romans and early Christians called it, blessedness.

To put it bluntly. Any freedom that is not a freedom seeking excellence is not true freedom. Because people are basically stupid and rarely truly understand what is best for themselves. After all, isn’t this why we marry? So that we can have someone point out how hopeless we are at times? It’s also why we have guardrails on windy roads, speed limits and nutrition labels on foods. To love the Lord Our God and to to love our neighbour is to seek freedom for excellence as we freely choose to make the world a better place.

PRAYER

Loving Lord.

When we look for freedom in the world, we find only bondage and slavery.

Lord, we have placed our faith in the wrong things,

for we know that there is no true freedom in this world, except in You,

For we are is intrinsically evil and the corrupting power

for which we grasp in today’s political arena is doomed to fail.

Call us to Your freedom,

So that we might be better than we are.

And in doing so may Your justice and freedom reign

in our hearts and in our world. Through Christ. Amen