**Reflections 29 June – 5 July – Free to be kind**

**Bible study on Galatians 5:1,13-25**

**Begin with an opening prayer**

Lord, you have given us the freedom
to follow you or to turn away;
to love or to hurt others;
to show care or to be unkind.
Help us to learn today
how to make good choices
and to love our neighbours as ourselves.
**Amen.**

**Explore and respond to the text**

*Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.*

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

**5**It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

**13**You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galations%205&version=NIV#fen-NIV-29176a)]; rather, serve one another humbly in love. **14**For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbour as yourself.”[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galations%205&version=NIV#fen-NIV-29177b)] **15**If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

**16**So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. **17**For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galations%205&version=NIV#fen-NIV-29180c)] you want. **18**But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

**19**The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; **20**idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions **21**and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

**22**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23**gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. **24**Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. **25**Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

 **Bible notes**

Jesus has set us free so we can live lives as free people. Chapter 5:1 is a hinge verse in Paul’s letter, coming at the end of the teaching that has taken up chapters 3 and 4; it is a summary of the message of those chapters, namely that our salvation depends on trusting Jesus and nothing else. Paul now spells out the implications of that.

There is something paradoxical about the freedom Christ calls us into: we are free to be slaves of one another; we are not under the yoke of the Law but we fulfil the Law through living lives marked by love of neighbour, the single commandment that the apostle suggests is a summary of the Law.

So, what is going on here? Paul is writing to communities that are tearing themselves apart over disagreements about the central teachings of the new movement – one camp arguing that we have to be subject to the Law and its works, the other asserting that we’ve been set free from all that. Paul says that having been freed through the faithful life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we are now to live as Jesus did in love for our neighbour – starting with our fellow believers.

Paul sets this in the context of a cosmic struggle (it really is that important!) that he spells out in verse 17, the sense of which he unpacks in the rest of the chapter. The struggle is between our sinful flesh and God’s Holy Spirit and verse 17 is a statement of intent that we will side with the Spirit. The final clause should not be understood as a cry of despair (i.e. ‘we’re too weak to compete’); rather, it is saying that we are not able to do certain things or live in a particular way because we are indwelt by the Spirit of God.

Paul then outlines two ways of living: the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit (vv.15-23). The climax of the section on the fruit of the Spirit is ‘there’s no law against such things’ (v.23). The Law teaches these things but cannot bring them about – only the Holy Spirit living within us can do that. In conclusion, as we belong to Christ and our old nature has died with him, we should keep in step with the Spirit and live as Jesus did, in love for our neighbours.

 **Reflection**

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

The Galatians seem to have been a divided and fractious people! In our reading, Paul not only offers a clear choice between ways of behaving but also points towards where we will find energy and grace to behave in ways that build up the faith of others and make our churches places of grace and kindness. How can we develop the fruit of the Spirit and exercise the freedom we have received in Christ? How can we truly love our neighbours, as Jesus did?

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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**Questions**

* What kindness have you shown/experienced this week?
* Is your church known for kindness?
* Where is kindness needed in your community? What can you do to show it this week?

 **A prayer to end the Bible study**

As we leave this place,
help us to be beacons of kindness.
Make us servant-hearted
and help us to love our neighbours as ourselves,
even when it’s hard.
**Amen.**