

Eaglehawk Uniting Church
Sermon for 30th June 2013
Rev Ralph Clarke
Scriptures: Galatians 5:1,13-26; Luke 9:51-62

Paul says Christians are called to freedom. That's good news for most of us. We love freedom, freedom to have time for ourselves, freedom from worries, or ill health, or from poverty, freedom to elect our government, freedom to say what we think, & so on. Young people often long to be free to do what they like, go where they like, when they like. Hungry people long for freedom from hunger, others want freedom from war, poverty, illness, death or slavery. I think we value freedom a lot.

Some of us can probably still remember that "I have a dream" speech in 1963 by Martin Luther King who said:

We are moving into a bright day of freedom.

We, through our struggles, through our sacrifices,
will be able to achieve the American dream.

This will be the day when all God's children,

black & white- Jews & gentiles,

Protestants & Catholics; will join hands and sing,

in the words of the old negro spiritual,

Free at last! Free at last!

Thank God almighty, we are free at last!

King was speaking about a new freedom in relationships between black & white Americans but I wonder if we have any more basic freedom now than then.

I sense that some Australians feel they are lacking freedom. Some bemoan any interference in their life & many complain that we are over regulated in Australia. Some feel less free than they would like to be.

In Galatians 5, St Paul was speaking about Christian freedom but in the past many Christians in Australia were not known for loving freedom. In earlier times the emphasis seemed to be on having rules against everything, dancing, cards, mowing the grass on Sundays or whatever. There was a lot of control over morals, & secular Australians complained about Christians as wowsers or killjoys. The church has relaxed a lot of things & some people are concerned it doesn't stand for anything anymore. Some people think Christians are now free to believe & do what they like.

When Paul speaks to the Christians in Galatia he tackles that do what you like attitude. Paul says "do not use your freedom to do what you like, especially things that destroy yourselves & others. Paul lists 4 sorts of life the Galatians must leave alone. These include the misuse of sexuality, giving allegiance to things rather than God, allowing passions like hatred to distort relationships, & giving too much place to

indulgent or selfish sins like envy or drunkenness. All these are ways of living for ourselves rather than for others. Because these lifestyles can hurt others they run counter to the life Jesus calls us to live.

St Paul wants us to see that freedom means accepting obligations, responsibilities & limits. We are not free to do anything we like. If we always say what we think, we will upset other people. If we feel free to go around hitting people whenever we want we will soon get into a fight, because others say we don't have the freedom to hurt them. We might also feel we have the freedom to eat what we like, but we can easily become sick if we eat the wrong things, or overweight if we eat too much. We might feel we can wear whatever clothes we like, but if we only wear a T shirt in winter we will get a cold. So in a whole lot of ways our freedom is limited. We are free only to live in certain kinds of ways, and for Christians, freedom - is freedom to love & serve Jesus. Nothing prevents that.

The freedom we have, says Paul, is freedom from excessive self concern. It is freedom to be there for each other & to love one another. We are free to live in the way of Jesus. Paul is saying. Christians are free to let the fruits of God's Spirit live in them. After listing the things to avoid, Paul lists the opposites - the nine fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness & self control. These are a sign of the freedom of Christ coursing through our veins.

Yet I wonder if we feel our life is marked by these gifts of the Spirit. I wonder if we start each day excited about letting these fruits of the Spirit govern all our relationships with people. What difference could it make to our witness as individuals and as the church if we were known for these fruits?

If our life is not producing these fruits I wonder why. For me it is usually because I revert back to concern about myself. Sometimes I have one eye on what everyone else does & thinks rather than following Jesus life & purpose. If that is true for you, let the Communion today be a free & whole hearted response to Jesus.