



22nd Sunday after Pentecost

25th October 2026



Loving God and Loving Your Neighbour

Freedom

Freedom. How would you define freedom?

One definition of freedom is the opportunity to exercise one's rights, powers, responsibilities, and the like. The Rev'd Peter Marshall said, 'May we think of freedom, not as the right to do as we please, but as the opportunity to do what is right.'^[1]

And Nelson Mandela said, 'For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.'^[2]

Hmm! You are probably wondering what this has to do with today's readings!

The Israelites were about to arrive in the Promised Land. They had been wandering in the wilderness for forty years and many of those who escaped slavery in Egypt had died on the journey.^[3] I wonder what they were thinking as they prepared to arrive. Did they still think of themselves as liberated slaves? Or had they really begun to identify themselves as God's chosen people? Perhaps that was the purpose of the time spent wandering in the wilderness; a time of letting go of the old and learning a new way of being; a time of learning what it meant to be people of God.

Moses was not to accompany them, so Joshua was appointed as his successor. Before they crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land, Moses gave them instructions on how they were to live in this new land. The first command he gave was, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.'^[4]

This was the commandment identified by Jesus as the greatest and first commandment in today's Gospel reading. The Pharisees tried again to trap Jesus by asking him which commandment in the law is the greatest. Apparently, it was quite common for Jewish thinkers of the time to ask questions seeking to condense the Scriptures into a 'nutshell'.

Jesus' response wasn't quite what they expected. He said that there are two commandments which go together and the second of the two is, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'^[5]

The two commandments are complimentary, aren't they? Loving our neighbours is, to a great extent, an act of loving God, in whose image our neighbours are made. To claim that we love God, we must make every effort to love our neighbours. John put it this way, 'Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.'

I remember being taught that the cross is not only a symbol God's love for us, but also of our loving response. The upright symbolises our loving relationship with God; and the cross-bar symbolises our loving relationship with our neighbours.

It's another way of understanding Jesus' command, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.'^[6] When our focus is on loving God and others and not on ourselves, we are continuing Jesus' mission. After all, Jesus' life and mission demonstrated both his love for God and his love for humanity.

Jesus told the Pharisees, 'On these two commandments hang all the Law and the prophets.'^[7] The Law requires righteousness as an expression of commitment to God's will. The prophets demanded justice for people at the margins.^[8]

This brings me back to Nelson Mandela's comment on freedom, 'For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.'

People often think that freedom means being able to do as they please: anything that they please. But that's not freedom, that's license.^[9]

We were created not to pursue our own satisfaction in isolation, ignoring our neighbours' needs, but to discover our true identity, calling and purpose through relationships with others. We find true freedom, happiness and fulfilment by living as we were intended: connected to others through supportive relationships and a caring community.

This isn't simply God's intention and command, but also God's promise and free gift.^[10]

[1] <https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/peter-marshall-quotes>

[2] https://www.brainyquote.com/search_results?x=0&y=0&q=Nelson+Mandela

[3] Numbers 32.11-12

[4] Deuteronomy 6.4-5

[5] Leviticus 19.18b

[6] Matthew 16.24

[7] Matthew 22.40

[8] Raj Nadella, *ibid*

[9] Merriam-Webster Dictionary: freedom that allows or is used with irresponsibility

[10] David Lose, *In the Meantime*