

Today is the Fifth Sunday of Lent and the fifth week of our message series on the Pathways to Freedom.

In week 1, Deacon Frank talked about experiencing lent in a different way, a way that is not bound by duty, rules, and good old catholic guilt. He asked a very important question: "Are we really free, free from sin and all of its trappings?"

We can also ask: Are we free from displaying our false selves to others, that mask we put on before going out into the world? Are we free to speak the truth, the real truth, regardless of the opposition we may face?

Lent gives us the chance to stop, contemplate, press the re-set button, and start over once again; to re-discover our connectedness to God. Jesus came to free the captives and to set our hearts free...freedom....freedom.

Faith and trust in God's promises can be another important pathway to freedom. In week 2, we discovered that with faith, we can look to the future with hope and trust. With faith we can know the rest of the story. We have the joy of looking ahead and knowing that God has something special in mind for each of us: **sharing His eternal life.**

We discovered a definition of faith from the letter to the Hebrews:

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for,  
the conviction of things not seen."

We have this knowledge of God and his love for us, but many times we have trouble recognizing the truth of who we really are. We have to travel that long distance from the head to the heart. That can be a very long and arduous journey for many of us.

We also heard from Romans chapter 8. This is one of my favourite passages:

"Who will separate us from the love of Christ?  
Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or  
famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?  
No, in all these things we are more than  
conquerors through him who loved us."

How fortunate we are to know the rest of the story beforehand. This is what gives us immeasurable hope and freedom; freedom from worry and concern over the world and its state, over our broken relationships; over our health concerns; over our financial distress.

Freedom to know that God is in control and that His purposes will be realized through, and in spite of all of life's circumstances. This freedom doesn't give us a care-free life but it does allow us to place our trust in the One who loves us deeply.

Last week, we were reminded that our inherent value is found in God's love for each of us. Our value doesn't diminish because of our sinfulness, our brokenness or our bruised and tattered lives. God sees us with the eyes of love.

The true heart of God is seen in the vision of the cross of Jesus; His pure unselfish generosity and love for us. Jesus is the grain of wheat that dies in order to bear much fruit. He is the one who loses His life for us, yet riser from the dead.

When we realize how much God loves us, not in our head, but in our heart, our transformation to hope and to freedom can begin. It is a process. We might have to declare to ourselves over and over how much we are loved and treasured by our Lord before we actually begin to believe it.

Today, our Gospel passage begins with desire. "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Now why were these Greeks so interested in an audience with him? Had they heard of his deeds and were hoping to see a miracle? Maybe they were hoping that he would grant them a request? Or were they skeptics, looking for a way to discredit him? We will never know for sure why they wanted to see Jesus because the Gospel doesn't tell us.

And what about us? Do we desire to really "see" Jesus? Do we really want the freedom that he can bring to us? Do we want to break the chains of our own sin and brokenness? Do we really want to stand up and speak the truth?

Can we remember a time in our lives when we really wanted Jesus in earnest; to experience his grace and his mercy; his closeness and his comfort? Maybe there were times when we just wanted what Jesus could do for us; our safety, security, health or healing from sickness. Were there times in our lives when we wanted to express our anger or disappointment when things didn't turn out like we had hoped and prayed?

Maybe there were times when we didn't want to see Jesus; didn't want him around; when we preferred to do things our own way, even if we knew they weren't what we should be doing? I've been there, in each of those situations, more than a few times, and I suspect many of you would say the same thing.

True joy and true freedom come from the Jesus who settles into the very core of our being, bringing comfort and a calming sense of peace. One of the most spiritual people I know is one of the calmest people I know. That's how I know he is close to God, his peace and his calm. Isn't that something that we could all live with?

Our Pathway to Freedom this week is to seek Jesus, as the Greeks did in our Gospel today. And in seeking him, we will discover how much he loves and seeks us as well.

We need to remember that Lent is not just about our sin and our brokenness. Yes, we fall, we fail, we disappoint. We are all in need of forgiveness! But that's not the whole story. When we finally "see" Jesus, we will discover that it is more about mercy and unconditional love.

It is more about who we are, daughters and sons of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus, in communion with the Holy Spirit, who fills us with God's abundant life.

Jesus desires to "see" us with an unwavering love, even when our desire might be a little shaky. He loves us whether or not we love Him back. I have struggled with this idea many times, preferring instead to see my own faults and failings and how I have disappointed God. The evil one makes sure that we dwell on our brokenness and not on our blessedness!

We have God's promise of love and faithfulness regardless of our struggles to be faithful to Him. This we can rely on. This is the good news! He is waiting for us, just as the Greeks waited to see Him in our gospel today.

So, are we willing to let Jesus love us, today, right now, with all our faults and all our flat spots, as my brother would say. Are we willing to let our guard down and just let him come into us, through the Holy Eucharist, through the power of his grace. Jesus tells us today: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." To peace, to calm, to joy, to true freedom. Thanks be to God!