

FREEDOM IN CHRIST

USPG⁺ PARTNERS IN
GLOBAL MISSION



A FIVE-SESSION STUDY COURSE

#FREEDOMINCHRIST

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INTRODUCTION

The word freedom can mean many different things to many people around the world – people can want freedom from conflict, from pain, from their pasts, for their future. Without freedom, we can feel trapped and confined – unable to move forward. Freedom is a fundamental human desire and so it is no surprise that it is spoken about so often in the Bible. Its focus is most frequently related to the spiritual freedom a person can experience in Christ. This is what we hope you will explore in more depth through this study course. Throughout this course, USPG's partner churches and organisations around the world will offer insights and reflections to what true freedom in Christ means in your life and in the communities you serve.



MAKING THE MOST OF THIS STUDY COURSE

1. Commit to attend all five sessions. The more you can attend, the more you will benefit and the more it will maintain the continuity of the group. Give yourself permission to refuse any other engagements or invitations that might arise at your regular study time.

2. Begin each study with a short time of silence to help centre the group and recall God's presence, then pray the prayer at the beginning of each session together.

3. Commit to sharing honestly and to listening without judgement or trying to 'fix' someone else's life for them. Seek to create a safe atmosphere in which people feel able to share openly. Remember, none of us has all the answers. Our aim is to be authentic and whole - not perfect!

4. Acknowledge that everyone's experience of life and faith is unique and valuable. Seek to accept one another just as we truly are, just as God accepts each one of us.

5. Give space for everyone to speak, although no-one need feel obliged to speak. If you are someone who tends to share a lot, remember to leave space for others who find it harder to share.

6. Read the material in advance and spend time allowing the content to sink in - not necessarily needing to find the answers.

7. Remember that religious and theological words can mean different things to different people. Share your perspective and allow others to hold different perspectives.

8. Close each session in prayer.

9. Commit to act. Each week you will discuss, reflect, pray and act. By changing your habits and raising funds for the world church you will be able to be part of something that is beyond your community and make a real difference.

WEEK ONE

BRAZIL

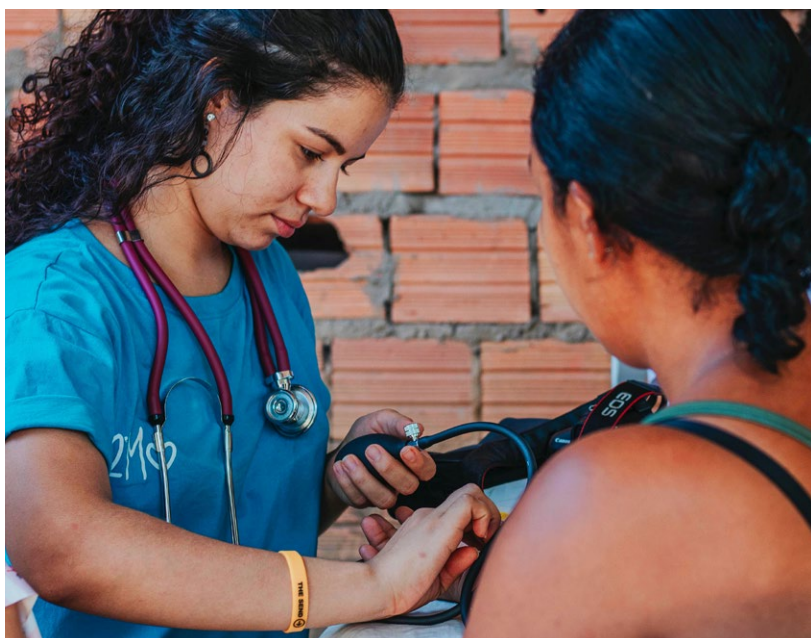
During this course we offer the possibility to rethink, reflect, repent and commit to change mindsets and behaviours. God is the God of freedom and liberation fully revealed in Jesus, the Christ who set us free to love and care for each other and the world we live in. In this meditation we invite you to think about slavery, captivity and oppression.

Why is freedom such an important spiritual theme to reflect, pray and act upon? Consider and share the moment that you have felt most 'free'.

READ JOHN 8: 31-37

Dispute over whose children Jesus' opponents are

- ³¹ To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.
- ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”
- ³³ They answered him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?”
- ³⁴ Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.
- ³⁵ Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever.
- ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.
- ³⁷ I know that you are Abraham’s descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word.
- ³⁸ I am telling you what I have seen in the Father’s presence, and you are doing what you have heard from your Father.”



REFLECTION BY REV'D BIANCA DAÉBS IGREJA EPISCOPAL ANGLICANA DO BRASIL

The theme of freedom is present in many biblical texts and especially in some Gospel passages, such as John 3:36, which emphasises the theme of freedom in Christ.

The text reads: "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed". Two questions arise from this: free from what and free for what?

To answer these two questions, it's necessary to get closer to Jesus and understand the principles that underpinned his life and ministry.

Jesus lived in a time when people were enslaved, women were worth less than men, the sick were beat down in body and spirit and left to die, the poor were plundered and struggles for power dominated the political agendas of corrupt rulers.

In this context, freeing people from their emotional, physical and social bondages is a daring and revolutionary experience. It means being truly free to love.

The freedom to love others as oneself, the exercise of otherness proposed in the Gospels, invites us to act in two ways: the first is to recognise where we are captive, to know exactly what our 'chains' are, our difficulties in prioritising what really matters or what transcends our relationships.

It is only after this experience of emptying ourselves of our vanities that we can go beyond ourselves and towards our neighbour.

The freedom proposed by Jesus replaces the centrality of the desire for power with the desire to be. Mercy, grace and forgiveness sustain the exercise of loving our neighbour as ourselves and bring us closer to God's plan for everyone to have a dignified and just life.

Therefore, Jesus frees us to love. And this love becomes a concrete gesture when we realise that the injustices of this world violate God's purpose for his daughters and sons. In this way, true freedom enables us to practically break down the social prejudices that in many ways destroy people's lives because of their race, gender, class, disability, etc.

But the freedom that Jesus proclaimed and promoted bothered those who had not experienced it. Hence this 'love that liberates' was a source of scandal for a patriarchal, slave-owning, strictly religious and unmerciful society.



Mercy, grace and forgiveness sustain the exercise of loving our neighbour as ourselves

In this world that God created, the freedom to love and serve direct human relationships and our relationship with our common home. Anything that violates these relationships takes us away from the dignified and just life that God designed for us.

Today, through his message, Jesus continues to invite us to experience the true freedom that enables us to break out of the bondages that still enslave us, to freely and collectively build a more just and dignified world.

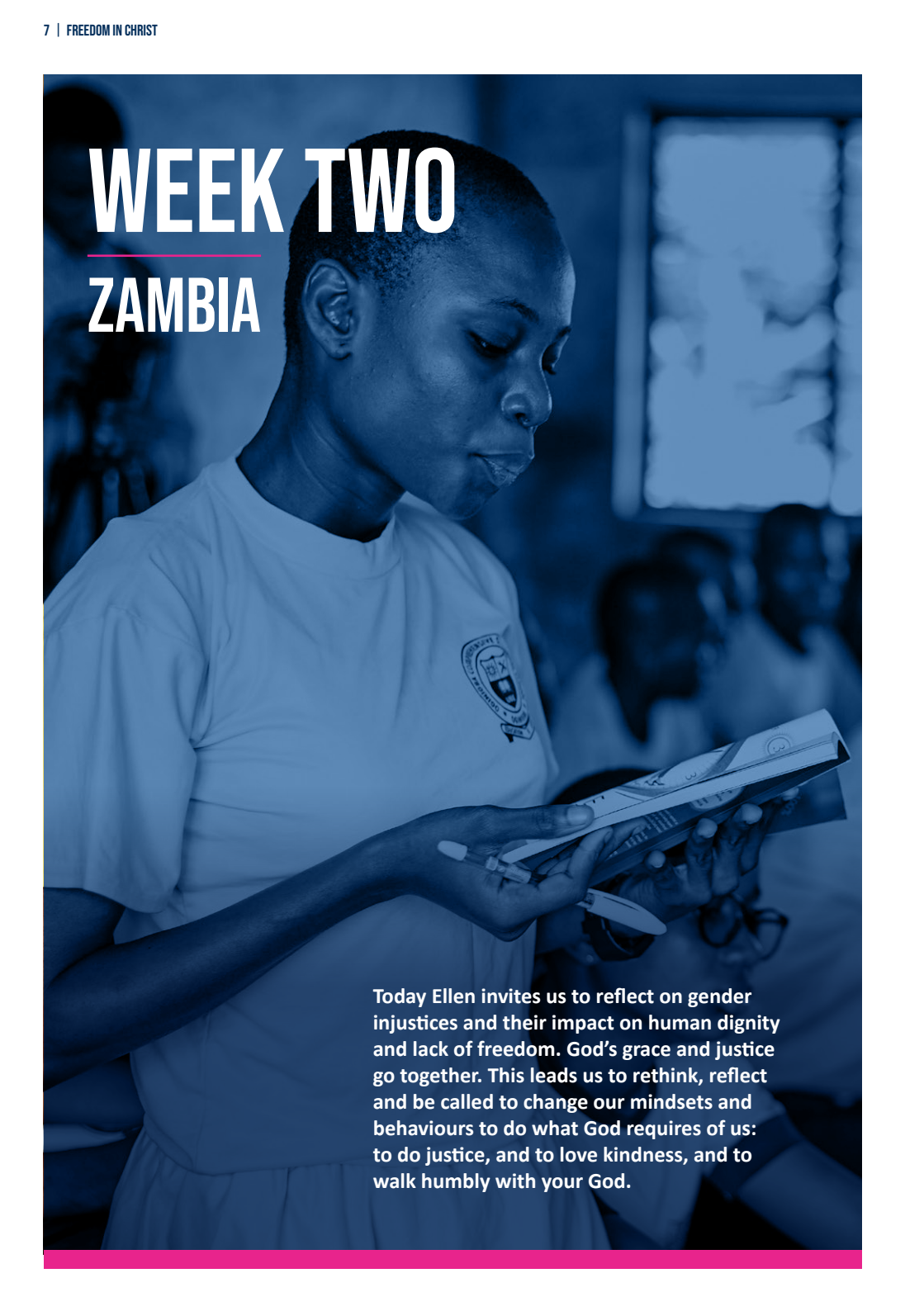


DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is going on in your personal and community life? If you are doing the meditation personally we suggest you write it down. If you are in a group, share what's happening and jot them down.
2. Think about situations where people are not free.
3. From the meditation above, what are your highlights? What struck you? Please share if you can.
4. How is freedom in Christ similar or different to other kinds of freedom?
5. What is God calling us to pray and to do?

WEEK TWO

ZAMBIA

A young woman with short hair, wearing a white t-shirt with a logo, is looking down at an open book she is holding. The image has a blue color overlay. In the background, other people are visible but out of focus. A pink horizontal bar is at the bottom of the page.

Today Ellen invites us to reflect on gender injustices and their impact on human dignity and lack of freedom. God's grace and justice go together. This leads us to rethink, reflect and be called to change our mindsets and behaviours to do what God requires of us: to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.

READ MICAH 6: 6-8

- ⁶ With what shall I come before the Lord
and bow down before the exalted God?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
- ⁷ Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
- ⁸ He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.



REFLECTION - ELLEN MC. MUBANGA COUNTRY DIRECTOR FOR THE ZAMBIA ANGLICAN COUNCIL OUTREACH PROGRAMME

To experience freedom in Christ we all need to be conscious of the realities around us. Gender inequality and injustice have created a great divide and caused pain and anguish. “The Call for Gender Justice” continues to be the voice humanity is raising - many men and women are joining hands to put an end to this injustice in homes and the community.

For instance, Zambia is one of the countries that has made strides towards gender justice, but more needs to be done to achieve gender equality and justice as can be seen from the Zambia Police Service report showing an increase gender-based violence (GBV) cases in 2021 at 20,540 to 24,290 in 2022.

According to Graça Machel (founder of the Graça Machel Trust and member of The Elders), “Gender equality is the goal that will help abolish poverty that will create more equal economies, fairer societies and happier men, women and children.”

In our journey of faith, Micah 6:8 says that we should act justly and love mercy. This scripture is a reflection that justice is a characteristic of human beings, as we are made in God’s image.

We are called to create and maintain justice by recognising that boys and girls and men

and women are created by God, redeemed by Christ, and gifted by the Holy Spirit without partiality. The call for freedom in Christ is a reminder to all to have mutual love and respect, celebrating the truth that God loves us (2 Corinthians 5:17).

This “being in Christ,” describes the status of women just as it describes the status of men in the church and community where there is unity —oneness and total acceptance of each other (Galatians 3:28).

Freedom in Christ brings balance, promotes gender justice as a foundation to proclaim dignity, equality, uphold values, inclusiveness and participation, mutual accountability and transparency that reflects respect for all people’s gifts. God is interested in fairness, in showing love and compassion, which makes for right relationships through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.



God is interested in fairness, in showing love and compassion, which makes for right relationships through faith in Jesus Christ

The call is for us to create gender justice in all spheres of life.

Therefore, it is the responsibility of the church and all of us around the world to make

conscious efforts to promote gender justice and remove injustices being practiced within our homes, communities and nations.



The Zambia Anglican Council marching for International Women's Day. ZACOP is committed to supporting women as partners in development. Photo: ZACOP.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is going on in your personal and community life? If you are doing the meditation personally we suggest you write it down. If you are in a group, share what's happening and jot them down.
2. What do you think about gender equality and gender justice? Why is this something a person of faith and/or the church should be concerned about?
3. Are you familiar with cases of gender injustices? Would you be able to share?
4. God calls us to "act justly, love mercy and walk humbly". What challenges does this calling bring?
5. What can we do personally and in community to foster gender justice and equality?

WEEK THREE

BRITAIN & IRELAND

Our spirituality is characterised by this deep sense of equality and justice, dealing with them as sources of life for everyone, and not for the few.



READ DEUTERONOMY 15:1, 4-5, 15

- ¹ At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts...
- ⁴ However, there need be no poor people among you, for in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you,
- ⁵ if only you fully obey the LORD your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today...
- ¹⁵ Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today.



REFLECTION - MATT CEASER, MOVEMENT BUILDER, JUSTMONEY MOVEMENT

The Exodus is perhaps the defining story of the people of God in the Hebrew Bible. They understood themselves as people who had been miraculously rescued from slavery and brought into a new land. For Christians, this story points ahead to the even greater rescue of all humanity through the saving work of Jesus.

Yet for many around the world today, poverty is limiting their sense of any kind of freedom.

Poverty means having fewer choices for how

to live, and bigger risks if those choices go wrong. It can also lead to exclusion from many areas of life, whether through lack of time, education, or status. Simple pleasures such as food, hobbies, and socialising become out of reach, as all money goes on essentials. The experience of poverty can feel a million miles from life to the full (John 10:10) or the freedom for which Christ has set us free (Galatians 5:1).

Poverty is on the rise due to the recent cost of living crisis, but it is rooted in ever-widening inequality. Since 1995, the top 1% have captured nearly 20 times more of global wealth than the bottom 50% of humanity.

Freedom in Christ, by contrast, sets us free from needing to

claim more for ourselves when so many remain in desperate need.

It is a collective freedom, not an individual one. Just as the Israelites were bound into a people by the liberation

of the Exodus, so we are bound together in the freedom of Christ.

Some would say that freedom in Christ sets us free from caring about money at all – to ‘consider the lilies’ (Matthew 6:28) – or go even further in preaching a prosperity gospel of abundance and wealth. Both positions are not only insensitive and offensive to those experiencing poverty but are also ignorant to Jesus’ own radical and confrontational teaching on wealth.

Jesus reserved some of his harshest words for those who were particularly attached to their wealth (Mark 10:17-31). Jesus’ instruction not to store up treasures on earth is wholly consistent with the Old Testament law like the one in our passage here.



Since 1995, the top 1% have captured nearly 20 times more of global wealth than the bottom 50% of humanity.

The seventh year cancellation of debts and fiftieth year restoration of land to its original owners, alongside laws that made provision for the poor in the short term, were designed to ensure that no one ever got too rich and no one got too poor. No Israelite could accumulate wealth in perpetuity, and none would be sold into slavery forever (as they were in Egypt), no matter how great their debts.

It is telling that these measures to guard against inequality were given to Israel directly after their rescue from collective slavery in Egypt. They were to remember how oppressive life in Egypt was, recall how God had rescued them, and live like they were free – not only in their spiritual lives, but in their economy too.

Sabbath and Jubilee policies are profoundly disruptive to modern economic structures.

Directly implementing them in our society may be unrealistic, but we can connect these biblical principles to areas of policy such as tax. As an example, the Church Action for Tax Justice campaign JustMoney Movement is calling for the introduction of wealth taxes on the very rich to address inequality.

God's vision of freedom, revealed in the Old Testament law and brought to completion in Christ, is clearly concerned that no one should feel the shackles of debt slavery and of poverty limiting their capacity to enjoy that freedom. And we, as Christians, must take up the challenge of ensuring that no one in our society would be in need when there are sufficient resources to go around. This means being generous with what we have and sharing with those in need, but it also means advocating for an economy that works for everyone.

JustMoney Movement aims to educate, campaign and advocate for Christians wanting to connect faith, money and justice. Visit justmoney.org.uk or [@justmoneymt](https://twitter.com/justmoneymt) on social media to find out more.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is going on in your personal and community life? If you are doing the meditation personally we suggest you write it down. If you are in a group, share what's happening and jot them down.
2. Does freedom in Christ change how you view money and wealth? What does this mean for those who are poor and those who are rich?
3. Are politicians in your country concerned about preventing poverty and building a fairer economy?
4. What resources do you have – financial or otherwise – that you could share with those in need where you are?
5. Visit the JustMoney Movement's Money Makes Change hub to find out how your use of money can shape a fairer, greener world.

WEEK FOUR

KOREA

TRUE REPENTANCE IS THE KEY TO CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

Revd Simon helps us to navigate the path of repentance as a path to liberation and freedom. We can do this because of God's grace, not by our own merits. It is important to let God in and transform us by His grace. In that way, our lives, lifestyles and mindsets change as we repent and choose to live God's way.



READ LUKE 13:1-9

Repent or perish

- ¹ Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.
- ² Jesus answered, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?”
- ³ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.
- ⁴ Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?
- ⁵ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”
- ⁶ Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any.
- ⁷ So, he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’
- ⁸ “‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it.
- ⁹ If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”



REFLECTION - REVD. DR. SIMON RO, DEAN OF GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AT SUNKONGHOE (ANGLICAN) UNIVERSITY, SEOUL, KOREA

I would like to start my reflection with a story about my seminary interview I had a long time ago with four priests. One of them asked me, “Why do you want to be a priest?” My answer was very simple: “I am here to seek true freedom”. Since then I have become a priest and I am still seeking true freedom. Freedom is central to my spiritual journey.

Freedom is an idea that permeates most of the major religions in our world. This idea is essential to any spiritual journey, and for many the journey focuses on how to become liberated from a love for self, a state of self-promotion and self-protection.

What is Christianity’s approach towards freedom? The Gospel of Luke (13:1-9) gives insights for this question, but a key idea is that of repentance.

In the Gospel, Jesus calls for decision and repentance by referring to the two disasters and by narrating the parable of the barren fig tree. The first disaster was the Galilean massacre. Notorious for his harsh rule and insensitivity to

Jewish religious beliefs, Pontius Pilate had caused the death of some Galileans while they were offering sacrifice. The other disaster was probably a construction accident at the Siloam reservoir in Jerusalem. Jesus revokes the popular speculations regarding the personal culpability of the victims of the Galilean massacre and the Siloam accident. Jesus stresses the universal need for repentance and shows us that unless we repent and respond to the challenges of our world, we will suffer such “disasters” as hopelessness, loneliness, frustration, anger and fear.

When our focus is solely on self-promotion and self-protection, the result is hopelessness, loneliness, frustration, anger and fear. But when we abandon our self and place our self in God’s hands, then God’s grace can make up for what is lacking in our lives. Through faith in God, our lives and journeys will take on new meaning and purpose.

Repentance and faith are the fruits that Jesus expects us



But when we abandon our self and place our self in God’s hands, then God’s grace can make up for what is lacking in our lives

to produce in response to his preaching. The parable of the barren fig tree shows that Jesus does not want just devotion but rather a deep sincere change in heart and attitude which results in a change of behaviour – both spiritual and physical.

For true freedom to happen, true repentance must occur. We are challenged to recognise the need for true repentance and pursue a change in our thinking, attitude, and behaviour. This is a message for consideration and change during this Lent season.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is going on in your personal and community life? If you are doing the meditation personally we suggest you write it down. If you are in a group, share what's happening and jot them down.
2. What is your understanding of the word freedom?
3. Reflect on the statement "Freedom is central to my spiritual journey" - what are your thoughts on this? To what extent do you agree or disagree?
4. Think about an occasion when you have asked for God's grace - how has that changed your behaviour?.
5. What do you think freedom would look like for your community?

WEEK FIVE

BARBADOS

In this reflection, Revd Dr Carlton Turner helps us to reflect on what it means to be free in Christ to act justly in a context where one is deeply implicated in colonial legacies. Stressing the need for repentance as a first step towards reparations, Turner reminds us that following Christ entails costly discipleship because it involves the need for the humility that comes from broken hearts, which can empower us to break free from the chains of the past and participate in the building of God's just future now.



READ LUKE 19:1 – 10

Zacchaeus the tax collector

- ¹ Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through.
- ² A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy.
- ³ He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd.
- ⁴ So, he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him since Jesus was coming that way.
- ⁵ When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.
- ⁶ All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.”
- ⁷ But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now, I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”
- ⁸ Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.
- ⁹ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”



The pre-launch of 'Renewal and Reconciliation: The Codrington Reparations Project' in September 2023.

REFLECTION – REV DR CARLTON JOHN TURNER, ANGLICAN TUTOR IN CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY & MISSION STUDIES AND USPG TRUSTEE

The story of Zacchaeus is a story of a change in mindset. It is also a story of the deep longing of God for his people – that being part of the Jesus movement requires the deepest encounter with our history, our identity, and who we dare to be moving forward.

When we think about Christian mission history, and in particular USPG and its work there is much to be proud of. But there is much that was not good, and much that remains unaddressed. USPG is one of many organisations and institutions that is currently owning up to its shameful past. The tide has shifted, and we're in an age in which a reckoning with the brutality of the past is everywhere. British colonial expansion was not an innocent thing. Mission, or the evangelisation of different parts of the empire was never divorced from violence and a sense of divine entitlement.

In 2023, USPG in partnership with The Codrington Trust launched 'Renewal and Reconciliation: The Codrington Reparations Project' [as background, in 1710 (U)SPG were bequeathed two working slave plantations in Barbados from Christopher Codrington which they worked and profited from until emancipation]. This is the opportunity for the organisation not only to repent

of one aspect of the past but also seek ways in which it can support restorative action to the communities and descendants of those enslaved on the Codrington estates.

As we undertake this vital work, it is worth thinking about how perhaps Zacchaeus could be a model of discipleship for us all today:

Zacchaeus represented a way of being that was normalised in his society. He was in an affluent city, with a unique position. It is easy to be ignorant, to look away or deny what has been done. There is a reason why this story matters at this stage of Luke's Gospel. It's necessary because the journey from exploitation to reparations is a deep process and a tough one. Zacchaeus desired Jesus more than his possessions. He knew and became aware of his historic wrongs – and sought to make it right.

One of the realities of colonial exploitation is that it lacks empathy for those who are crushed within it.



Zacchaeus reminds us of the need for broken hearts to see the legacies of oppression, and then humbly begin to address them.

It will not see what it has done. It remains blind to this oppressive nature. Zacchaeus reminds us of the need for broken hearts to see the legacies of oppression, and then humbly begin to address them.

Following Jesus is not easy. Facing history is not easy. Making things right is not easy. But it is the only way of mission. Mission is 'literally' costly. Freedom of justice in Christ is hard work. But it is God's work.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does today's reflection speak to what is going on in your personal and community life? If you are doing the meditation personally, we suggest that you write it down. If you are in a group, share one or two points if you can.
2. Have you ever experienced a significant change of mindset? What inspired the change?
3. What might we be denying or ignorant of?
4. How might we seek to address our own area of weakness? Think about the various methods that can be a mirror on our own lives and societies.
5. Identify one action that you can take from today.



THANK YOU

With your support, we have been able to help fund the vital work of our global church partners. Here are some of the achievements of the Anglican Episcopal Church of Brazil, as they support HIV & AIDS awareness work through their programme at Casa A+.

- Providing a medical facility to provide essential treatment to people in the community who are HIV positive
- Providing weekly food packages to individuals and families
- Training and support of medical staff and counsellors
- Educating local communities to challenge the stigma surrounding HIV
- Advocating for policies that address the root causes of stigma and misinformation

Thank you for standing in solidarity with the world church, your support is helping our partners life-changing work.

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USPG would very much like to keep in touch with you to keep you updated on the work of our partner churches and communities worldwide. Managing your details well is important to us and we would like to contact you in ways that work for you. If you have already opted in to receive emails from us we will continue to communicate with you in this way. You can unsubscribe at any time. However, if you are not receiving our enewsletter please do let us know whether we can contact you via email.

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Use our Bible study courses – we have a range of resources for you to use in your church. You can download or order them here www.uspg.org.uk/resources

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