

Pastoral Letter August 2021: Revd Sue Cooper Writes

Dear Friends,

As I write, we have just past “Freedom Day”, and many folk are being very cautious still; understandably as the numbers of Covid continue to rise, however, thankfully we are not seeing the same rise in deaths, which is largely due to the vaccines. In our Churches we will move forward gently, and each Parish may do things differently, but I would ask you all to consider the people sitting around you in Church, and their wellbeing as well as your own. Freedom day doesn't feel very free somehow!!!!

I have been struck with how anxiety producing the daily news is, either for good things such as freedom day, or bad such as being “pinged”. Every day there is a new problem or misdemeanour that outrages people, or spreads fear, and it is fuelled by the media. But sometimes it is good outrage, as with a few weeks ago when the England football team managed to win their way to the Euro finals. This event itself was met with the most joyous enthusiasm and collective feeling of hope that we have seen for a long time, (football certainly unites folk.) By the time it came around, the hype around the final itself was at fever pitch, only for our hopes to be dashed again with those now infamous penalties.

The defeat was hard to bear, but what was to follow, by way of the players being criticised and racially abused was truly shocking. This online hatred is something new to us older folk. It's hard to comprehend why anyone would be so hateful and nasty and actually post their hateful views for the whole world to see. In this case there was an outcry of good outrage which showed support for the young footballers who were already feeling crushed. But they responded with maturity and wisdom, and the nation got behind them with encouragement and pride.

But as I write this just 10 days later, it seems like a distant memory, and no one is even talking about it now!

There used to be a saying when I was young that said “Today's news is tomorrow's fish and chip paper”...which meant that whatever was headline news one day, would be gone and forgotten the next, and the newspaper then used to wrap fish and chips in,(I am showing my age now). Whatever the issue of the day, we will always be affected by the news headlines, and the news around freedom day was no different.

The thing is, mankind has always reacted to “the latest issue” since time began, it's nothing new. In the New Testament the apostle Paul was having trouble with the outrage of people over the food laws and conventions of his time, and he was having to bring a calming message to settle things down again. The argument was about what type of meat was being eaten, and the new freedoms the Christians were exercising with their newly found freedom in Christ. Paul tried to defuse the argument by telling the Church this,

“I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but not everything is constructive. No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.” (The Believer's Freedom 1 Corinthians 10: 23)

St Paul could say the same thing today!

In this new time of “freedom”, not all people are in the same place of feeling thrilled about the lifting of all restrictions, so let's continue to extend our care and concern to our neighbours as never before, and let's not get so drawn in by media hype that we lose sight of our love for one another. God bless you all,

With love Rev Sue