

Jesus resurrection brings freedom.

Acts 5:27-32 and John 20:19-end

Billy Taylor was an American jazz musician and composer who in 1963 wrote the song *I wish I knew how it would feel to be free* which dealt with civil rights issues and it became the unofficial anthem for the civil rights movement.

The song has been covered by many artists, not least Nina Simone in 1967 (and I'm going to play her version of the song at the very end of the service.)

The song is about a longing for freedom.

I wish I knew how
It would feel to be free
I wish I could break
All the chains holding me

In 2001 Lighthouse Family recorded a version and I'm going to play a section of their video in a moment.

The video gives us glimpses into the lives of the people on a tube train. As the lead singer walks down the train he encounters

A girl who is homeless
A guy stuck in a low paid kitchen job
A girl who is an exotic dancer
A girl who endures domestic abuse
A woman visiting her husband in prison
A young boy being racially abused.
An elderly person and a young black woman who is a cleaner.

The song begs the question. What would freedom be for each of these people.

Film Clip - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TeCAkrq4fNE>

I wonder how St.Peter might answer the question, 'what does it feel like to be free'?

When we encounter Peter in the Easter story he is a broken man. He doesn't lack courage; it was his courage that put him in an impossible situation.

When Jesus was arrested, it was Peter armed with a sword who was willing to fight. When Jesus was at the Chief Priest's house, it was Peter who went there to be near him. That's when the trouble started.

The Chief Priest and the Sanhedrin are desperate to find anyone who could testify against Jesus. If Peter admitted he knew Jesus and was questioned, his testimony (if he was truthful) could get Jesus killed. I think Peter would have willingly swapped places with Jesus, but to admit he knew him was to sign his death warrant.

So three times he denied he knew him, each more desperate than the last. And then he wept. The man he loved, respected, honoured and followed was the man he denied knowing.

Our first reading today shows a very different Peter.

Restored to leadership, affirmed by Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit he is giving the full beans to the Sanhedrin.

The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross.

He doesn't mince his words does he?

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Freedom for St.Peter didn't involve air-brushing his past, minimising his story and re-telling his life to make himself look good. Freedom for him was the forgiveness Jesus gave, the restoration of his purpose and the affirmation of Jesus love. Peter could say Yes, this was what I was like, this is what I did. I'm now free of my false-self, the person I thought I was. I'm now really me – in the love of Christ.

I wonder how St.Thomas might answer the question, 'what does it feel like to be free'?

When we encounter him earlier in the Jesus story he's the only one willing to look a fool by saying 'what are you talking about?' 'We don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?'

Thomas doesn't do the abstract...he's a practical person who wants to know in simple terms what it's all about. Thomas would call a spade, a spade and not a garden implement.

The other disciples tell him they have seen the Lord and he just does not believe. I've put myself in Thomas shoes. How would I feel?

I think I would be so hurt, so lost, broken and so deep in the misery of bereavement I wouldn't allow myself to hope in something so fantastically outlandish simply to have it all crash back down on me again.

But this was the last time Thomas doubted, this was the last time his pessimistic dour self got in the way of joy. Jesus showed up. Jesus doesn't berate Thomas for being Thomas but meets him fully with the proof of his real resurrected self. He tells him to stop doubting and believe and Thomas has only one response.

My Lord and my God. He worships.

Thomas could say, I was forever uncertain and questioning, I simply couldn't switch off my clinical mind and uncertainty at what was fantastical despite the miracles I'd seen. Then Jesus told me that I could stop doubting and believe because it's not held together by me and my understanding; it's held together by Him. My freedom is from uncertainty and is in His love and power.

The music video I showed you earlier depicted various characters locked into their situations. They seemed alone and without hope and yet the singer saw each person. You and I know that Jesus is not a magic fairy. Jesus doesn't wave a wand and transform every situation in the blink of an eye and yet he promised life in all its fullness.

Freedom in Jesus Christ starts with the longing to be free. As we encounter Jesus, our perspective changes and our hope is restored. The transformation begins deep inside.

You are loved. You are forgiven. I affirm your worth because I see the real you.

Our freedom and transformation are found in the love of Jesus Christ, so vast it's beyond measure.

I don't think this is news to you. I believe you know what I'm talking about. There will be those things you are now free from, things you are becoming free from, and some chains still need to be broken. This is true of you as individuals and the whole church.

The answer is in the love of Jesus and a longing to be free.

Let us pray.

Jesus resurrection brings freedom.

Song Lyrics.

I wish I knew how
It would feel to be free
I wish I could break
All the chains holding me
I wish I could say
All the things that I should say
Say 'em loud say 'em clear
For the whole round world to hear

I wish I could share
All the love that's in my heart
Remove all the bars
That keep us apart
I wish you could know
What it means to be me
Then you'd see and agree
That every man should be free

I wish I could give
All I'm longin' to give
I wish I could live
Like I'm longin' to live
I wish I could do
All the things that I can do
And though I'm way over due
I'd be starting a new

Well I wish I could be
Like a bird in the sky
How sweet it would be
If I found I could fly
Oh I'd soar to the sun

And look down at the sea
Than I'd sing cos I know - yea
Then I'd sing cos I know - yea
Then I'd sing cos I know
I'd know how it feels
Oh I know how it feels to be free
Yea Yea! Oh, I know how it feels
Yes I know
Oh, I know
How it feels
How it feels
To be free

Rev. Jon Hutchinson, 24 April 2022