

LYNITA'S PONDERINGS

BORN TO SET YOUR PEOPLE FREE

There have been several elections around the globe during this year. The right to vote came after many people fought very hard for universal suffrage, and this right is part of our democracy, despite all its flaws. In democratic countries we have freedom: freedom of speech, movement, association, religion, etc. And while freedom can never be absolute, it is an important part of being human.

But notwithstanding the fact that we have freedom, there are many who are still in bondage, in a figurative or literal sense. During the next few weeks, there are a number of international days which focus on groups of people who are not completely free.

The Sunday before Advent, 24th November, marks the beginning of what has become known as the Sixteen Days of Activism and the Methodist Church has designated it as Domestic Abuse Sunday. This day, and the fifteen subsequent days, will highlight the fact that domestic abuse is a worldwide phenomenon. Such abuse is not limited to physical violence, but includes psychological manipulation and coercive control. Many partners in an abusive relationship live in fear of their safety and that of their children. This is not freedom.

Sunday 1st December is World HIV/AIDS day. Despite the improvement of drugs there are still many people infected and affected by Hiv/Aids who are in bondage because of the stigma attached to this disease.

Tuesday 3rd December is the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Despite equality legislation there is still much ignorance surrounding this group of people. This leads to prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination, much of which is indirect and unintentional.

And Tuesday 10th December is International Human Rights Day. This commemorates the adoption on this day in 1948, of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This came in the aftermath of the Second World War, during which many people were killed because they were Jewish, gay, or disabled.

As we approach the season of Advent and Christmas, we remember that Jesus was born in a country occupied by the Romans. At a very young age, he and his parents became refugees in Egypt, because the tyrant, King Herod, had decided to kill all boys under the age of two years. And I wonder what Christmas will be like in Bethlehem this year; probably no better than Christmas 2023.

Jesus came to set us free. In his first sermon he declared that he had come to set the captives free, to release those who were in bondage. His was a message of grace, not law.

As Jesus' disciples, we are challenged to work harder to free those who are in bondage and to ask to what extent, both individually and corporately, we are complicit in causing people to remain in bondage, by our attitudes and stereotyping? The words of Charles Wesley, written during the 18th century, still hold true:

"Come, thou long-expected Jesus, Born to set thy people free,

From our fears and sins release us, Let us find our rest in thee.

Born thy people to deliver, Born a child and yet a king,

Born to reign in us forever, Now thy gracious kingdom bring."

May the season of Advent and Christmas be a blessed time when family and friends come together and a time when we will reach out to those who are lonely because they have no family and few friends. May it also be a season during which we will reflect on the significance of Jesus' birth both in our lives and in the lives of our community, living out and spreading the message of freedom and love.

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