**Thursday 23rd July**

Galatians 5: 1

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Occasionally you hear a very sad case of someone who has spent a long time incarcerated who is released from prison, but then is unable to adjust to life as a free person. They have become so used to prison walls, a very structured life and having all their decisions made for them that a life of freedom seems too difficult. Sometimes these people then go on to commit another crime in order to return to prison.

In this verse from Galatians, Paul is urging us not to make that very same mistake. He is exhorting us to treasure the freedom that we have in Jesus. When we give our lives to Jesus, responding to His invitation, he sets us truly free! He releases us from slavery to sin (that’s when you end up in patterns of thought or behaviour that you don’t want, but you feel powerless to make better choices). He releases us from fear and hopelessness. The freedom He offers is priceless – and it cost Jesus everything. And yet it is so easy for us to become enslaved again. Paul is addressing the particular problem of trusting in anything other than Jesus. He is urging the Galatians not to put their trust in religious practices. There can be the same temptation for us today. Anytime that ritual takes the place of relationship will lead us into slavery. It becomes about doing the right things, following a set pattern of behaviour in order to be acceptable to God, rather than trusting in the all-sufficient gift of Jesus. And there are many other ways in which we can be tempted into things that will enslave. It’s amazing how those prison walls have the power to entice us. You can take the prisoner out of prison, but it sometimes takes a little longer to get the prison out of the prisoner!! That’s why Paul says ‘Stand firm’. Remember there is no other way in which we can know freedom – only through Jesus.  He has done everything necessary for us to live freely with Him, the way that we were designed to.

*Lord Jesus, thank you that you died to set us free. Thank you that when we belong to you we discover what freedom is really about – a life lived in relationship with you. We pray that you will help us to stand firm in the freedom your give. Amen*

