

Wonderful to be baptising Ronnie and Charlotte today.

St Paul's Cathedral for Abie's ordination - meet her next Sunday - Partnership picnic.

Vocation = deacon/priest/bishop

Job title = curate

Long list of things a deacon is called to be. At the end the Bishop says to the deacons.

"You cannot bear the weight of this calling in your own strength, but only by the **grace and power of God**. Pray therefore that your heart may daily be enlarged and your understanding of the Scriptures enlightened. Pray earnestly for the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Someone who knew about the grace and power of God was Paul.

Paul who encountered Christ on a busy road - murderer but no longer.

He built his foundations on the grace of God. He understood that to do that requires a total submission to the righteousness of God.

As Paul is writing his letter to the church in Rome he is reaching to find the words to describe the freedom that brings.

He lands on a word that is translated as servant, or in our text today slave.

The language of enslaved people is difficult language for us to hear. With the awful history of people being enslaved by others it is challenging to understand this as a positive.

Someone who knew the realities of being enslaved is Samuel Ajayi Crowther.

Samuel Crowther:

- Capture & Liberation (1821–1822): Enslaved at age 12 in Nigeria; liberated from a Portuguese vessel by the Royal Navy and resettled in Sierra Leone.
- Educated at St Mary's Islington (1826) and later at the CMS College on Upper Street; ordained as the first indigenous West African Anglican priest in 1843.
- Consecrated at Canterbury Cathedral on June 29, 1864, as "Bishop of the countries of Western Africa beyond the Queen's dominions"
- Spoke out against slavery, and his autobiography was a key voice used by British abolitionists
- Built an entirely self-governing, self-supporting local missionary infrastructure
- Established education networks, including Africa's first secondary school for girls
- Translated the Bible into Yoruba in 1884.

In his translation of Romans 6, Bishop Crowther, uses the Yoruba word *eru* to translate the word we read as slave.

Eru - "eh-ROO" (making sure your voice pitches upward on the second syllable)

Eru means bondsman - a total submission of rights to a master. Which Bishop Crowther chose because it closely matches the full devotion Paul is speaking about in this passage.

We all choose what to give ourselves to.

We have choices about how we order our lives and our very being.

These things can become masters over us.

Addiction, work, money, greed, pride, vanity, anger, bitterness. Things that Paul calls out as sin and says will ultimately lead to death.

“The wages of sin is death”

They lead to death because they lead us away from the source of life - God.

These things have become too deeply embedded, to enslaving of us, for us to be freed from in our own strength.

Paul says that it is only through the the grace of God in Jesus Christ that we can be freed.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The free gift of God’s grace.

Given and paid for by Christ.

Freely offered to us.

It is why in baptism we turn away from sin, and turn to Christ.

Baptism is the sign and seal of God’s grace freely given to us in Jesus Christ and our willingness to direct our lives to Christ.

We have all fallen short of God’s perfection. We have all directed our hearts and our lives to things other than God.

We all need to know the free gift of grace that comes through Jesus Christ.

In 1826, Samuel Ajayi Crowther sat in the pews of St Mary’s as a 12-year-old schoolboy recently freed from slavery.

44 years later, on June 19, 1870, he returned to St Mary’s church—not as an enslaved person, but as a fully consecrated Bishop of the Anglican Church

To lay hands on his youngest son, Dandeson Coates Crowther, ordaining him as a deacon.

Bishop Crowther knew what it meant to be set free from enslavement, in both a spiritual and a physical sense.

He knew that in the total giving of ourselves to God's grace we find true freedom, the free gift of God in Jesus Christ.

It is said that Bishop Crowther would regularly be heard singing that great hymn: "O for a thousand tongues to sing"

In a moment of remarkable connection that hymn was written by Charles Wesley when he was a minister here at St Mary's in 1739.

That hymn contains these words:

O for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise;
the glories of my God and King,
the triumphs of his grace

He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
he sets the prisoner free,
his blood can make the foulest clean;
his blood availed for me,

May we know and receive God's grace made perfect in Jesus Christ,
and may we know the freedom that only Christ can bring.