



It's often hard to know what to say. Last week I was catching-up with an old friend who was saying how unbearable her marriage had become; how empty she felt and how overwhelmingly trapped. From my perspective, she didn't look trapped at all; just at a crossroads, where the choice to stay and the choice to leave would both be costly. It's all I had so it's what I offered: "You're not trapped; you could leave this afternoon. It'll be hard to stay and hard to leave. Which hardship is most worth facing?" Out of this something emerged for her, something shifted. She discovered again her freedom and responsibility, her own agency; that she had a choice to make.

Mental illness, disability, poverty, marginalisation in all its various shapes and sizes limit our choices. But they do more than stop us from making choices; they eventually stop us from believing that we are capable of making any choices at all. Even the smallest choices – when we get up in the morning, what we eat, how much we eat, what radio station we listen to – even these start to feel out of our hands. We find ourselves complaining about what's on TV and yet can't seem to choose to turn it off. Maybe we want to get up earlier in the morning, but day after day, it just doesn't happen. We can do any of these things, but we don't. We become like a bird that remains in its cage even when the door is open, no longer able to imagine the possibility of flying.

Prison is all about limiting a person's agency. Limiting it yes, but not eliminating it. There is a prisoner who comes to the church service every week and each time tells me he's feeling 'fantastic', 'great', that life is good. Last week curiosity got the better of me and I asked him what was really going? He said that for him, MRC didn't stand for Metropolitan Remand Centre. For him it stood for *My Resurrection Centre*. A place where he died to his old self and was born into a new self, a self that had found purpose and meaning through a relationship with God. Out of this deep, abiding solace he had begun to embrace his own agency, and the fullness of his humanity. Being in prison, for him, was no obstacle to this. He told me of his role, his vocation to live for others, to serve his fellow-prisoners, to offer a word of encouragement, to challenge assumptions, to stand for something.

He reminded me that many of the important decisions we make are really very small ones. Visiting a friend we have lost touch with, walking in our local park at sunrise, committing to a prayer or meditation practise, reading a book that we know will challenge how we see the world, learning to cook a new meal, listening to a different radio station. All these can lead us back to the deep, abiding solace that is at the core of being human.

I watched the prisoner leave the chapel, told to stop at the gates, to wait, to turn his pockets out and to raise his arms. After the guards frisked him he was allowed to move along to his yard, his unit, his cell, carrying nothing . . . except that deep, abiding solace for which we all yearn.

Every blessing as you make the big small choices of this week,
James Godfrey EACH Chaplain