This is a sermon about sin. If I had published the title beforehand, what would you have been expecting – and would it have made you want to come? Something faintly titillating? Boring? Threatening?

What's so sexy about sin? Perhaps it’s the attraction of something forbidden: because it breaks boundaries, it suggests to us the illusion of freedom. But in fact it's the opposite - because freedom is found in commitment. The flower that uproots itself from the nourished soil in the name of freedom will wither and die on the path. It simply cannot flourish outside of its created place.

One of the greatest paradoxes of the Christian life is the relationship of sin, law, and freedom – and how it is that freedom can be found in the obeying of a law ... or not. It’s all about what’s going in within that obedience.

Paul's passage neatly explains that as soon as we know where the boundaries lie, our rebellious nature, well, rebels - mostly, we don't like boundaries. (Except those of us that do, and we will come back to this group in a little while.) The rest of us instinctively believe that freedom is the absence of boundaries.

But freedom is not about going anywhere - because anywhere may not be safe. I can wander anywhere in Coventry - but if I ignore the signs down between Sainsbury's and the Transport Museum, where there are no kerbs to restrain me, but which say 'Watch out for buses', my exercise of freedom could be short lived. It could come to a red and sticky end.

Freedom is about being in a space to flourish. God offers us that space - and it's a space to share with one another, as a gift from God, and respecting the boundaries he has set upon it which emerge from what's good for us, and for others. Sin is living outside those boundaries, or causing others to do the same.

Our experience of living a life which is good for us, and for others, should be the experience of freedom. It's not the experience of living without boundaries, but living freely within them, knowing they set out where and how it is good for us to live.

And it's probably better to see that as a freedom which is constrained not so much by where we should not go, but by where we should. A freedom bound not so much by prohibition, but by commitment. To live God's way is to live in relationship.

The freedom of the gospel is the freedom to be in relationship, not to be set free from it. To be committed, rather than free from commitment ... isolated and alone. We are invited by the gospel to be in a committed relationship with God in Jesus Christ. He has offered us that relationship. And the commitment he offers and invites is two way.

That may not sound like freedom. It's not, in a way. It's a commitment. It limits, restricts, our freedom to live our life in a way that is damaging, perhaps fatal, to ourselves or to others. But is that the freedom we want? It offers, instead, the freedom to really live.

You may have heard me before when I have been speaking of the African concept of Ubuntu - I am because we are. It is a word that captures something right at the heart of human life, that I am made for relationship and only find myself in relationship with others. (It is the very opposite of what Jean Paul Sartre wrote when he said 'hell is people' - although that can sometimes be true.) The sense of really living which we experience as part of a team, or a crowd, united in common purpose or celebration, is the gift which is offered us as citizens of the a Kingdom of God.
It's the reason men and women continue to commit themselves to one another in marriage - or, of course, in other forms of partnership. We know that in commitment lies true life, however costly that commitment is. The cost, of course, is considerable - and so for many people those commitments become strained to breaking point, and beyond. And the casualties are both the parties, and those whose space to flourish should have been protected within that relationship - the children. (Talk about fostering and adoption, and the need to offer love.)

In the gospel passage this morning, Jesus challenges his hearers, and through them ourselves, to commitment. Don't be like those children who look on from the side of the street when others are playing and refuse to join in. Instead, learn what it means to be actually yoked with him, with the Messiah, God's savior walking the streets of the world.

“Come unto me, those who are burdened and heavy laden ....” The burdens Jesus is talking about here are the burdens of the written law. I said I would come back to those who like to keep the rules. Keeping the rules can be just as much a way of saying 'I'm in charge of my life and my destiny' as breaking them all. Instead, Jesus says, what's important is to discover commitment in relationship.

I find the image of the yoke compelling. The way it's shaped, and fits perfectly. Like the priests stole. But this is more than that, it's being yoked with Christ. You mean we are in this together? Challenging, but wonderful.

This has been a sermon about sin. Or rather, about avoiding it, through commitment. How would you define sin? Going our own way, rather than God's? The root of everything that's wrong with the world, or my life - or the lives of others?

What do you want to be different in the world, in Coventry? Is that the same as the things God wants to be different?

What he wants is for us to be in real - and that means committed, long term - relationship with Him and each other. We can begin to put that into place today. (To build agape love.)

We are called to be ... A reconciled and reconciling people. A city of peace and reconciliation. A reconciled world. Willing to be yoked together with Christ, and therefore with one another.