

VIEW FROM THE HEIGHTS February 2022

Greetings,

Last week, the BBC reported on a robot vacuum cleaner that “escaped” from a Cambridge (UK) Travelodge.ⁱ The fact that the cleaner was able to negotiate the lip at the entrance to the hotel was not that remarkable. But the report of its “adventures” and the comments of the readers are both enjoyable and insightful. Catch the article if you can on the BBC website.

The hotel’s assistant manager told the reporter that it “*had run for its life*”. Commentators wished it well. One noting that “*it has no natural predators in the wild.*”

Another cautioning that, “*nature abhors a vacuum*!”ⁱⁱ

Love it!

The highlight of this story is, of course, everyone’s delight at the vacuum cleaner’s bid for freedom. The shared “hope” was that the robot, freed from the daily round and the docking station, could safely enjoy life on the outside. (The runaway was found the following day under a hedge in front of the hotel. It was safely restored to its home and is “*now back sitting on a shelf with the rest of the robot vacuum family.*”ⁱⁱⁱ)

We all enjoy freedom stories – even when the hero of the tale is an appliance! As we should! Free will is foundational to God’s design of Creation. Squirrels are at liberty to search for acorns – or raid bird feeders. Flowers can be planted in one patch only to blossom & grow in an entirely different part of the garden. Humans have been gifted with the autonomy to choose kindness, courage, and ethical behaviour over their opposites.

Unfortunately, liberty can also be used to hurt and harm. When it does, we rue freedom. But goodness can only happen when a man or woman is able to choose among alternative actions. A coerced good deed might be of use in some fashion, but its agent cannot claim the moral high ground. Hence, the Divine gift of liberty for all people. Hence, the Baptist insistence on “soul liberty.”

Baptists believe that serving God and our neighbour should not be restricted by creeds and conduct codes. The saints of the Christian faith have been motivated by one principle only: love.

Prayer and discernment determining, **in any given instance**, how that love should be transformed into action.

Love caused Dr. King to use non-violence in his campaign for civil rights. Love led Dietrich Bonhoeffer to join a plot to assassinate Hitler. Love calls us to be mindful of the public health and the common good. Sometimes, it invites us to take measures to help end food poverty. On other occasions, it prompts us to invite a neighbour over for a cup of tea.

The kindness of the human heart lets us delight in a robot vacuum's bid for freedom! Far more pleasurable are freedom's gains for people. We long for the day when children will be free of violence and warfare. When men and women everywhere will be at liberty to achieve self-actualization. When the broken, the lost, and the lonely in our own communities will be able to find the help, support, and love that they need. The holy work of liberation awaits.

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*God's Spirit is on me;
he's chosen me to preach the Message of good news to the poor,
Sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and
recovery of sight to the blind,
To set the burdened and battered free,
to announce, "This is God's time to shine!"
Luke 4: 18 The Message*

Deepest Blessings,

Brenda

ⁱ "Robot vacuum cleaner escapes from Cambridge Travelodge," BBC News: East of England, 1/22/22

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.