

Free to be bound

By [Dennis Sanders](#)

August 20, 2015

*To receive these posts by e-mail each Monday, [sign up](#).*

*For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes Sanders's current Living by the Word column as well as past magazine and online-only content. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.*

When I was in my mid 20s, I came down with pneumonia bad enough that I had to spend two weeks in the hospital. I felt cut off from everything. I had no idea what things were like on the outside.

In time, I got better and was released from the hospital. My parents, who came from Michigan to care for me, dropped me off in downtown Minneapolis to go to the bank. As I stood in the giant atrium of the IDS Center, Minnesota's tallest skyscraper, I noticed how the place buzzed with activity. Around me, people were using the city's well-known skyways to make their way to lunch or back to work.

I stood there for a moment to take it all in. After weeks at home and at the hospital, away from the public, I was now back among the living. I was free.

In Ephesians 6, Paul starts off talking about how to dress--spiritually, that is--in our daily Christian walk. But in verse 20 he says something rather strange: "I'm an ambassador in chains for the sake of the gospel."

American culture is based on freedom. We are free to speak how we want, to worship whatever God (or no God). We are free to make decisions and free not to. There's a reason the Gadsen flag is so popular--you know, the one with the snake that says, "Don't tread on me." Americans want to be free to be without obligation.

But then we have Paul, telling us that he is an ambassador in chains. That's an odd image. When we think of ambassadors, we think of powerful people who ride in fancy cars doing important things. We don't think of someone in chains.

Paul seems to have a tight bond with God and with his faith. Paul isn't talking here about freedom or choice. Instead, he sees the gospel as something that not only frees people but also binds people together. Faith is less something that we choose than it is something that won't let us go. Paul feels compelled to share the good news of Jesus; he feels that he has little choice. He just has to be a witness to God.

Can we see our faith as something that has got a hold of us? Are we willing to be ambassadors like Paul, ambassadors who show ourselves bound to God?

Sometimes freedom means giving up the need to be in control and binding ourselves to the good news.