

## Praying for freedom and healing

On Thursday 7th April, the Park Hotel-Prison (in which dozens of people had been detained in torturous limbo for over a year) finally stood empty, and almost all of those who found themselves locked up in Australia after being 'medevac-ed' here from PNG and Nauru for supposed medical treatment were able to walk free for the first time in 9 years.

This is something to be celebrated.



It is something we have worked extremely hard for – both those who have been fighting for their own freedom for so long, and those who stand alongside them.

It is something to be cherished.

As someone who has only ever known freedom, I know I can never truly appreciate its preciousness – I think the closest I have come to it is experiencing the thrilling and completely surreal feeling of seeing a friend who was previously (and incomprehensibly) locked up for so long – simply walking down the street, with no walls around them. And this would be a complete drop in the ocean compared to how they must feel, and their understanding of the true meaning of freedom.

So, as many have reminded me over this last month, it is important to take a breath...

And celebrate this win.

However, I want to hold two spaces here – as sadly it is also important to acknowledge that it is not yet time to brush our hands and say: 'job done'! As perhaps the headlines might like us to believe.

Unfortunately, many refugees and asylum seekers remain cruelly and indefinitely locked up by our government both onshore and offshore (see the Refugee Council of Australia website for up-to-date statistics: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/statistics/>). Once again, they have been 'left behind' whilst others are given freedom – left to deal with the yet another layer of devastation this brings. And because they are trapped within the place that causes their trauma, they cannot even begin to heal until they are released.

So it is important that they know we have not forgotten them.



Then there are those who have been released (both recently and over the last couple of years) - for many it is only then that the traumas of so many years can begin to be processed, and so (along with the lack of permanency and support) the post-freedom journey can present many new challenges.

As many have been grappling with in this time, it can feel difficult to hold these many and seemingly contradictory big feelings at once – joy and exaltation of freedom; grief, sorrow and trauma of years detained and years lost; devastation for and of those once again left behind in detention.

All of these are equally true and present.

As Christians, supported in faith and prayer, I think we are well placed to hold and sit in this challenging and complex space, and to move forward in action from it.

Here are a few simple ideas of what that can look like, and what might be helpful at this time:

- **Donate** to organisations supporting recently released refugees:
  - Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project is a Melbourne-based initiative of the Brigidine Sisters who are doing a lot of on-the-ground work supporting refugees (e.g. they have been a key support for many in accessing housing immediately after release): <https://basp.org.au/you-can-help/>
  - Refugee Voices is a refugee-led organisation that is fundraising for money to go directly to recently released refugees, to help them buy essentials such as food, clothing and transport: <https://chuffed.org/project/funds-for-released-refugees>
  - Foundation House supports and empowers refugees who have been affected by torture and trauma to rebuild their lives: <https://foundationhouse.org.au/>
- **Advocate** and continue to speak up for more just policies such as an end to indefinite and arbitrary detention and temporary protection visas (which leave people in endless and unsupported limbo in the community).
  - If you would like to learn more about how you can get involved in advocacy, please feel free to email me at [lovemakesaway@gmail.com](mailto:lovemakesaway@gmail.com)
- **Pray** for freedom and healing and world in which the debate is not about who can make the toughest borders, but who can open their arms widest and face challenges with humanity, rather than cruelty. Pray for those who feel the deep sting of our government's policies every day, so that they might feel our love through God's love. Pray as your heart calls.

**Abi Benham-Bannon**