

Service by Brigitte McCready 6th September 2020

Chalice Lighting and Introduction

We are not imprisoned and the state we live in is not officially classed as a dictatorship. We are friends; members, supporters and explorers of a liberal faith community. If we are looking back at other times in history we can make the statement that we seem to enjoy degrees of freedom which were clearly denied to the common people of previous generations. So why are we not full of joy?

In writing these lines I notice how careful I am with my wording. Speaking about freedom is not an easy business.

Maybe we need to tackle the problem from the opposite direction and ask ourselves what makes us unfree.

The answers will be most certainly varied, but many people will list fear as a factor which makes us feel unfree; so let us explore the relationship between fear and freedom. Let us also dwell on how we can cultivate, enjoy and expand what helps us in our quest for freedom.

These are points I want to ponder about with you in our time together.

1st Hymn Green Book No. 33 Do You Hear

Do you hear, o my friend, in the place where you stand,
through the sky, through the land, do you hear, do you hear?
In the heights, on the plain, in the vale, on the main,
in the sun, in the rain, do you hear, do you hear?

Through the roar, through the rush, through the throng, through the crush,
do you hear in the hush of your soul, of your soul?
Hear the cry fear won't still, hear the heart's call to will,
hear a sigh's startling trill in your soul, in your soul?

From the place where you stand to the outermost strand,
do you hear, o my friend, do you hear, do you hear?
All the dreams, all the dares, all the sighs, all the prayers --
they are yours, mine, and theirs: do you hear, do you hear?

Musings on Freedom by a German National

Not so long ago, on a Saturday morning, I received a hoax phone call from somebody pretending to be from the tax office. On the surface I reacted very calm and collected and the false tax inspector soon gave up trying to threaten me with impending imprisonment. But deep down I felt quite shaken up. I attributed this feeling to the fact that I am not very good with officialdom. I can defend others, but as far as my own person is concerned I am rather a coward. Partially, at least, I also blame my German roots for that. German is the only language I know which even has a word for people who abuse their powers in order to make those who turn to the authorities for help and support feel low. We speak of 'Schaltermentalität' (counter mentality) i.e., you who stand in front of the counter, know your place. I am sure that a similar kind of mind-set exists everywhere, where people enjoy having somebody to look down upon. This identifies one of my personal freedom killers.

Being German also comes with a debt to history. We are, and will never be, the only nation which committed atrocities, but the scale that the Third Reich operated on is horrendous. I only recently began to see that as no longer an unshiftable burden, but as the strongest appeal ever to do better; to be there with all the others who say 'Never again!'

I was an anxious child, like a bird just trying to peep outside my cage, and I have grown into an adult who can manage her anxieties. Sometimes I do even better; sometimes I can grow wings.

Prayer: Have Fear, Give Hand ~ Brigitte

I was a rather anxious child, but I had a magic formula: "Have fear, give hand". A friend helped me to see in that also a metaphor for a relationship with God. On this basis I developed the following prayer:

When the night has been too long And dawn does not seem to come:

Have fear, give hand. Hold me in the security of your love, God

Guide me to see glimpses of light

In the darkness which surrounds me. When I cannot get things right

And my life seems to be shattered in a million pieces:

Have fear, give hand.

So that I can start to pick up the pieces And build something beautiful in my life.

When I despair about my own shortcomings and anxieties:

Have fear, give hand.

Give me courage, God Just enough to match my anxieties.

Let me rest in the security of your help, God

So that I can give a hand to those Who are living in fear.

Sometimes ~ Frank Reintgen

Sometimes I am sad

And then I wish there would be a hand

Which lives up to promises.

Sometimes I am lonely

And then I wish there would be a look

Which lives up to promises

Sometimes I am fearful

And then I wish there would be a word

Which lives up to promises.

2nd Hymn Green Book No. 3 Joy of Living

We sing the joy of living,
we sing the mystery,
of knowledge, lore and science,
of truth that is to be;

of searching, doubting, testing,
of deeper insights gained,

of freedom claimed and honoured,
of minds that are unchained.

We sing the joy of living,
we sing of harmony,
of textures, sounds and colours,
to touch, to hear, to see;

of order, rhythm, meaning,
of chaos and of strife,
of richness of sensation,
of the creating life.

We sing the joy of living,
we sing of ecstasy,
of warmth, of love, of passion,
of flights of fantasy.

We sing of joy of living,
the dear, the known, the strange,
the moving, pulsing, throbbing –
a universe of change.

Bible Reading – Acts 16: 25 34

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." Then they

spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

Prayer: Screaming ~ *Elmar Gruber – trans Brigitte*

As long as I can still scream deep from the bottom of my soul	I am still alive
When I scream in my troubles I have a feeling of being liberated	I say goodbye to
what holds me captive and tortures me	It is taken from me by him who
hears my screaming, who hears me	My screaming includes being listened to.
Dear God, let me scream in my troubles	Bend down your ear towards me
When I am screaming to you, until you listen. Amen	

Prayer: Don't be Afraid ~ *Elmar Gruber – trans Brigitte*

Don't be afraid.
 Look at the flowers, how they grow
 The buds which open up, bloom, and then wilt
 They flower only for a short time and come again and again,
 new and different.
 If God takes such good care of the flowers
 How much greater is his care for you
 Even if you don't believe nor can feel it.
 Therefore: Don't be afraid.
 O God, you let the flowers flourish
 Let me feel that you always care about me,
 Even if there are many things which
 I don't understand. Amen

3rd Hymn Green Book

No. 133 How Can I Keep From Singing?

My life flows on in endless Song
 above earth's lamentation.
 I hear the real though far-off hymn
 that hails a new creation.
 Through all the tumult and the strife
 I hear the music ringing.
 It sounds an echo in my soul -
 How can I keep from singing!

No storm can shake my inmost calm
 while to that rock I'm clinging.
 Since love prevails in heaven and earth,
 how can I keep from singing!

What though the tempest round me roar,
 I know the truth, it liveth.
 What though the darkness round me close,
 songs in the night it giveth.

When tyrants tremble sick with fear,
 And hear their death-bells ringing,
 when friends rejoice, both far and near,
 how can I keep from singing!
 To prison cell and dungeon vile
 our thoughts of love are winging:
 when friends by shame are undefiled,
 how can I keep from singing!

Sermon: "Being Free"

1) Guided reflection: Identify some of your personal freedom killers. Try to reflect also what helps against those, partially and sometimes at least.

2) Freedom, just like happiness, is not a permanent state; they both always require our input. Sometimes its absence is more noted than its presence.

3) It takes courage to claim your freedom. In my student days I had a cartoon by the artist F K Waechter on my walls. It showed a small angry pig which stood outside on a grassy knoll, looking in at the other pigs huddled together in the pigsty. The little angry pig shouts "If you don't love your freedom, you can remain in your pigsty and let them make sausages out of you." The little pig was also a very wise pig.

4) The 'Bürgerlied' (citizen's song) is a song from the revolution of 1848. It became very popular with the German left, especially the students. It was popular in the late 1960's and throughout the 1970's. Many folk concerts finished with the 'Bürgerlied' being played with many in the audience joining in. (there is a decent version of it on Youtube),

'Bürgerlied of 1848

Many verses affirm the all-inclusiveness of the plea for democracy, e.g., “crosses who adorn you or the cross you have to bear, both can join the movement” but in the second part of the song there is a clear call for active involvement: “It matters if we create something new or just digest the old like a cow; if we create something in this world or just look at it; if we have a brain in our head and fire in our heart which can be ignited easily, that matters. If we are behind walls, lazily huddling together, that matters.” It goes on for quite a while like that.

There is not that much difference between the angry little pig and the ideas of the Bürgerlied of 1848

5) What I have stated up to now is predominantly a political concept. What happens if we add religion to that? In my eyes not a lot changes. Because whatever my concept of God is, it is not one where I have no responsibilities. God is a 'support system' in my struggle for freedom, and that is a lot.

6) A Lutheran Protestant minister once said something rather beautiful to me which I think ties in with that: “God made us breakable, but he doesn't want us to be broken” I don't know if I agree with 'made us', but I wholeheartedly agree with the 2nd half of the sentence. As it is said in the Book of Joshua 1:5 “I will not fail you or forsake you”

7) We are the creators of our own freedom and we can also be instrumental in spreading freedom to others in a small and in a big way. We can't tackle all injustice, but we can train ourselves not to look away. In these days that means a lot. It probably always has meant a lot, but we have far less excuses with the accessibility of information we have got. So let us get skilled in not looking away.

8) Accepting limitations can give you more freedom. Some of our dreams will be always that: dreams. That does not make them less valuable or less apart of us, just a different part. Accepting that might be painful, but also liberating.

9) Is there a 'New' openness in 'unfree times' or are we dealing better with people's vulnerabilities? I hope so, and there are indications for that. We seem to have instilled real concern and honesty into our “How are you?” and time and patience to wait for a real answer.

10) Freedom from hate: the German author and playwright Bertolt Brecht had in his study a mask from an indigenous culture. It showed an evil demon. In his notes Brecht remarked that in studying this mask it became clear to him how hard it is to be evil. The same applies to hate. Hate destroys the hater more than the hated. And we should never pass our hate onto the next generation either. That would destroy their freedom to find their own place in life.

11) 'Carpe Diem' Tackle the world; you are free to do so; build something beautiful in the freedom of this day. It was a long and hard journey, battling with the dragons called freedom killers. Enjoy all the progress you have made.

“I call that mind free, which jealously guards its intellectual rights and powers, which calls no man master, which does not content itself with a passive or hereditary faith, which opens itself to light whencesoever it may come, which receives new truth

as an angel from heaven.

I call that mind free, which sets no bounds to its love, which is not imprisoned in itself or in a sect, which recognises in all human beings the image of God and the rights of his children, which delights in virtue and sympathizes with suffering wherever they are seen, which conquers pride, anger, and sloth, and offers itself up a willing victim to the cause of mankind.”

William Ellery Channing – Spiritual Freedom (1830)

4th Hymn

Green Book

No. 233

Others Call It God

A fire-mist and a planet,
a crystal and a cell,
a star-fish and a saurian,
and caves where cave-folk dwell;
the sense of law and beauty,
a face turned from the clod -
some call it evolution,
and others call it God

Like tides on crescent sea-beach,
when moon's so new and thin,
into our hearts high yearnings
come welling, surging in,
come from the mystic ocean
whose rim no foot has trod -
some people call it longing,
and others call it God

Haze on the far horizon,
the infinite tender sky,
the ripe, rich tints of cornfields,
and wild geese sailing high;
and over high and lowland,
the charm of golden rod -
some people call it nature,
and others call it God

A sentry frozen on duty,
a mother starved for her brood,
and Socrates drinking hemlock,
and Jesus on the rood;
and millions, who, though nameless,
the straight, hard pathway trod -
some call it consecration,
and others call it God.

Benediction

Blessing . God speaks: “I want to bless you, and you will be a blessing to others.” Help others gain and preserve their freedom.

Honour your own freedom by using and celebrating it each day. Honour your struggles by spreading your wings.

Feel yourself empowered to take good care of yourself and the world.

Amen