

FREEDOM (90) - Inspired by the George Michael song

Week #3 of the 5-Week Series, "The Songs of Life"

Oct. 25, 2020

Rev. Richard Maraj

Rev. Richard Maraj: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center's Sunday virtual worship celebration. I'm Rev. Richard Maraj, senior minister; so glad you're joining us! And, of course, I know by now everybody knows that we are not only LIVE every Sunday at 9 a.m. out on the lawn – outdoors – but we will also be LIVE at 11 a.m. Two services every Sunday outdoors! And we will be posting these indoor recordings online every Sunday and every Wednesday. So come check us out LIVE; it's safe, it's good. The energy is really wonderful! And for those who don't feel ready yet, we'll continue enjoying these Sunday recorded versions.

Right now we're going to jump into our service. Rev. Lori will lead us in a time of prayer and meditation. And to prepare us for that experience, we will now listen to our choir singing "Surely the Presence."

Unity Choir (singing remotely):

Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place;
I can feel God's mighty power and God's grace.
I can feel the brush of angel's wings;
I see glory on each face.
Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.

MEDITATION

Rev. Lori Fleming: I invite you to join me in a time of prayer and meditation. As we close our outer eyes, take in a deep, cleansing breath, and release it slowly. Begin to relax your shoulders and your neck, letting go of any busy-ness you've had so far today. Just gently let it go. Take in another mindful breath and, as you release it, begin to move your awareness within: into your heart space. That space of unconditional, divine love. That space where we are one with the Divine.

As we feel that love radiate throughout every cell of our body, knowing that God is right here, right now: present in us, and as us, and through us. Lifting us up. Encouraging us. Bringing good into our lives in every area, because God is good all the time. We recognize that there is only one presence and one power, and that presence and power we call God. We call Divine. We call Spirit. That is the one power in the Universe that created us and sustains us, and vitalizes us. Bringing healing energy to every cell of our body. Bringing us to wholeness in body, in mind, and in spirit.

As we rise up in consciousness – into that Christ Spirit, that Jesus, our Wayshower, came to teach us: how to be more loving. How to heal ourselves and heal each other. Jesus told us that this we could do also: create miracles in our lives.

And so, in this moment, we open our minds and we open our hearts to the miracle of God in us. To the miracle of new, loving relationships. To the healing of any relationships that were less than loving. To forgiveness. To the letting go of anything that's less than love. In this Thanksgiving season, we are so grateful for all of our blessings. We know that we have too many blessings to count, and the ones we focus on are the ones we get more of.

And so, in this Thanksgiving season, we recognize those loving family members. We recognize the beautiful places we live. We recognize all the people in our lives who love us and care about us. And for the ones that don't, we send love to them, because that's what Jesus taught.

And so, in this Thanksgiving season, we are grateful for everything. And, as we move more deeply into the silence, we begin to think, *"I am grateful; I am grateful; I am grateful!"*

SILENCE

Sweet Spirit, we come in gratitude for this season of Thanksgiving that reminds us to count our blessings. We're thankful for each and every person in our lives. For all of the good that we have, and all of the good that is coming our way. Because God told us that we could have the kingdom of heaven: right here, right now. And so we say, *"Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God!"* And it is so. Amen.

SONG

Kirsten Plambeck: "Freedom (90)"

I won't let you down
I will not give you up
Gotta have some faith in the sound
It's the one thing good that I've got
I won't let you down
So please don't give me up
'Cause I would really, really love to stick around, yeah

Heaven knows I was just a young boy
Didn't know what I wanted to be
I was every little hungry schoolgirl's pride and joy
And I guess it was enough for me

To win the race? A prettier face!
Brand new clothes and a big fat place
On your rock and roll TV
But today the way I play the game is not the same
No way
Think I'm gonna get myself happy

I think there's something you should know
I think it's time I told you so
There's something deep inside of me
There's someone else I've got to be
Take back your picture in a frame
Take back your singing in the rain
I just hope you understand
Sometimes the clothes do not make the man

All we have to do now
Is take these lies and make them true somehow
All we have to see
Is that I don't belong to you
And you don't belong to me, yeah yeah

Freedom
Freedom
Freedom
You've gotta give for what you take

Freedom
Freedom
Freedom
You've gotta give for what you take

Heaven knows we sure had some fun, boy
What a kick just a buddy and me
We had every big-shot good-time band on the run boy
We were living in a fantasy

We won the race
Got out of the place
I went back home got a brand new face
For the boys on MTV
But today the way I play the game has got to change
Oh yeah
Now I'm gonna get myself happy

I think there's something you should know
I think it's time I stopped the show
There's something deep inside of me
There's someone I forgot to be
Take back your picture in a frame
Don't think that I'll be back again
I just hope you understand
Sometimes the clothes do not make the man

All we have to do now
Is take these lies and make them true somehow
All we have to see
Is that I don't belong to you
And you don't belong to me, yeah yeah

Freedom
Freedom
Freedom
You've gotta give for what you take

Freedom
Oh, freedom
Freedom
You've gotta give for what you take

[Instrumental]

Well it looks like the road to heaven
Feels like the road to hell
When I knew which side my bread was buttered
I took the knife as well
Posing for another picture
Everybody's got to sell
But when you shake your butt
They notice fast
And some mistakes were built to last

That's what you get
Oh, that's what you get
Yeah, that's what you get
Oh, that's what you get for changing your mind

That's what you get
Oh, that's what you get
Oh, that's what you get
Just hope you understand
Sometimes the clothes
Do not make the man

All we have to do now
Is take these lies and make them true somehow
All we have to see
Is that I don't belong to you
And you don't belong to me, yeah yeah

Freedom
Freedom
Freedom
You've gotta give for what you take

Freedom
Oh, freedom
Oh, freedom
You've gotta give for what you take

Yeah, oh, freedom
Freedom
You've got to give for what you take

Freedom
Oh, freedom
Freedom
You've got to give for what you take

MESSAGE

Rev. Richard Maraj *[clapping]*: Whew! Thank you, Kirsten! Fabulous, fabulous, fabulous job! Thanks so much! You just put your heart and soul into it all the time, and I just love that! Thank you!

So have you ever felt stuck, limited or held back from living the kind of life you want to live? Or have you ever felt trapped in an unhealthy situation that you just desperately wanted to break yourself free from?

This morning we are going to talk about freedom. You know, we live in a free country; that we are proud of our freedoms. They are guaranteed, and they are spelled out in our founding documents. And as free as it says clearly that we are, H. Emilie Cady – in her book, *Lessons in Truth* – said that human beings do not live freely. Because we believe that we are in bondage to our circumstances, and that we are controlled by our conditions. We believe – at some level – that we are powerless. That we are victims. That we are helpless. That we are sinners and slaves, rather than believing that we are children of the Most High God. Rather than believing that we are God's beloved offspring, and expressions of the Divine and join heirs with Jesus Christ.

In 1 Peter, Chapter 2, Verse 16-17, it gives us some clear direction. And it says: *“Live as people who are free.”* Live as people who are free! *“Not using your freedom for evil, but living as servants as God. Respect everyone. Love the brotherhood. And honor God.”* That’s very clear: It says live as people who are free.

So the question is: Are you living as freely as you could live? And if you were living as freely as you could live, what would you be doing and how differently would you be living your life right now, instead of the way you’re living it? You know, what are the things you’d try that you’re not trying now? What things would you stop doing that you’re currently doing right now?

This is clear and powerful direction for us in how we live: Live as people who are free! Because the truth is, we are free; we just don’t always believe it or claim it or live and express our lives as freely as we possibly can, and we are meant to live and be.

You know, this is Week #3 in our 5-week series, “The Songs of Live.” And this week we’re looking at George Michael’s song from 1990 called “Freedom.” And this message is really a personal story of his, where he’s feeling trapped and limited by his recording label, which was Sony back then. And not feeling that he had creative control or had the freedom to determine his image and style and creative abilities. That, while he appreciated the success they had as Wham – and being teenage idols – he felt that he had grown out of that, and was compromised in the way that they were trying to promote him. And he wanted his freedom to develop his own style, his own personality, and live his professional life and his personal life on his own terms.

So this song is about a declaration of making a stand for his personal and professional freedom. What is interesting is that George Michael wrote two hit songs with the title “Freedom.” In 1984, when he was 19 or 20 years old, he wrote the first hit for Wham called “Freedom.” And then, six years later, he wrote this song about his freedom. Because he felt compromised. And it’s interesting that the freedom he thought he enjoyed at 20 is different than the freedom he wanted when he was 26. Because he understood himself better. He understood the music industry. He understood life better! And so freedom meant something different to him at both of these stages of his life.

So I ask you: Where in your life would you like to feel and experience greater freedom? And how is the freedom that you want today different than the freedom you thought you wanted 10 or 15 years ago?

Let’s look at some of the lyrics of George Michael’s song, “Freedom,” just to get a flavor of the energy of the song. It says:

“I think there's something you should know

I think it's time I told you so

There's something deep inside of me

There's someone else I've got to be ...

I just hope you understand

Sometimes the clothes do not make the man.

All we have to do now

Is take these lies and make them true somehow.”

And his way to make it true is to declare his personal and professional desire for his own freedom. So what message can we get about freedom, and how we can live our lives more freely and joyously?

And the first thing is about connecting to the foundation of freedom. You know, the story of the children of Israel breaking free from their bondage in Egypt, and making their journey to the Promised Land, is actually one of our personal stories: a breaking out of our own bondage of our limited beliefs and our negative and limiting ideas and images of ourselves. To break ourselves free to know our oneness with

God. To liberate us, that we may move to our personal Promised Land of living life more freely and abundantly.

In 2 Corinthians, it says this: *“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where there is the Spirit of the Lord, there is freedom.”* And what it’s really saying is that God is the foundation of our freedom. That true freedom is an inner freedom: it is a spiritual freedom of knowing our oneness with God. Because where there is God, there is freedom! That means that, where there is God, we are connected to the allness of all that God is. That, where there is God, we experience the freedom of God’s love and peace and joy and abundance and unlimited goodness.

In the presence of God we are connected to all hope, to all healing, to all possibilities, to all creativity, to all ideas. All of the resources and the goodness of God we could ever desire! Live our lives freely and abundantly. We are one with it when we know that God is the foundation of our freedom.

In the Book of John it says the famous lines: *“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”* When we know our oneness with God – and unify ourselves and live and abide in God’s love. And to live and abide in our faith and belief in God is that we will know the truth that will set us free. And the way to know that truth is to unify our mind in the mind of God. To literally immerse our mind in the mind of God.

You see, it’s one thing to know an idea of freedom; it’s a whole different thing to actually experience it. And it says the way to do that is to *“Be still and know that I am God.”* The more we quiet our mind and align our minds and immerse our minds in the mind of God, the more we feel and experience the fullness of our inner freedom. It gives us peace. It reassures us that we are never alone; that we are always supported and guided and provided with all that we need to live life, and live it more abundantly.

The Apostle Paul said, *“Let the same mind that was in Christ Jesus be in you.”* And so, the more we quiet and immerse our mind, and to be still and know, the more we will feel that inner freedom.

You know, a part of that experience Jesus demonstrated for us beautifully. And I think we miss it. The greatest thing he demonstrated for us was his daily commitment and his consistency of quieting his mind, and meditating and praying regularly. He quieted his mind and prayed in the morning, mid-day, afternoon, evening and night. He did it consistently! So he knew the inner freedom of knowing his connection and oneness with God.

And the truth is: When we know that spiritual freedom – that inner freedom – the circumstances never will make us feel trapped. Even if we’re poor, even if situations aren’t going as well as we’d like, once we have that inner peace and freedom, it changes our entire experience.

Nelson Mandela and Viktor Frankl were imprisoned ... and, yet, they had an inner freedom, because they knew their connection to God. They knew their connection to Spirit. They knew their connection to the Source.

See, the most liberating thing we can do ourselves – that sets us free – is through our connection and our oneness with God. Because then there will be nothing in our lives that can possibly hold us back, because we will know that inner freedom.

So when we connect with that spiritual freedom – that foundation of our freedom – it gives us freedom to live our lives more fully. And an important thing: It gives us the freedom to do, I believe – it’s not going to sound that spectacular, but I think it is – it is the freedom to say, *“YES!”* or to say, *“NO!”* to the things in our lives. That’s a powerful freedom! Have you ever said *“Yes”* to something that you really wished you’d said *“No”* to? Or have you ever said *“No”* to something and, later, you wished that you’d said *“Yes”*?

In the Book of Matthew, Chapter 5, Verse 37, it says this: *“Let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes!’ or your ‘No’ be ‘No!’; everything else comes from evil.”* This is how powerful our “Yes” – finding our “Yes” and finding our “No” – truly is. It’s a sign of freedom to be able to say, “Yes!” And a sign of freedom to be able to say, “No!” Because, to me, saying “Yes” is giving yourself the permission to freely live your life: say “Yes!” to life! It’s about saying “Yes!” to love. Saying “Yes!” to peace. Saying “Yes!” to opportunity. Saying “Yes!” to our goals and our dreams. Saying “Yes!” to things that scare us! Saying “Yes!” to what our soul is calling us to do and to live.

And so that is a powerful expression of our freedom: is to say “Yes.” And an equally powerful expression of our freedom is the freedom to say, “No!” Have you ever said, “No,” and then felt guilty about saying “No”? Felt bad about saying “No”? Almost apologetically saying “No”? That’s not the fullness of the freedom of finding your “No”! We sometimes – not saying “No” – waste a lot of time and effort and energy in situations, in relationships, in projects that really don’t serve our highest good. But we need to learn how to find our “No.” The freedom to say “No,” and to know you don’t need anyone’s validation or permission or approval. That you are just authentically living from that place of freedom within yourself and in your heart and in your life.

You know, freedom ultimately, really, is about being fully responsible. See, when we are free it means that we have the power and the resources to make our choices. Because life is a culmination of all our choices. And the best choice is to be clear on your “Yes” and to be clear on your “No.”

There’s a beautiful line of Scripture in the Book of James. It says: *“Anyone who hears the Word, but does not do what it says, is like someone who looks at their face in the mirror and, upon walking away, forgets what they look like.”* Every time we say “Yes” when we mean “No,” or “No” when we mean “Yes,” it is like we forget who we are. It is to forget that we are children of God. Forget that we are amazing spiritual beings. That, every time we say “Yes!” it honors God; it honors ourselves; and it aligns us with our true selves. And every time we say “Yes!” and “No!” authentically, it is an amazing expression of your power and your freedom.

And so, the next thing it gives us – when we have the foundation of freedom – it gives us the freedom to say ... to let go of the past. The freedom to let go of the past.

You know, I saw this Peanuts cartoon once. And it was Charlie Brown coming in from the outfield, handing the ball to the manager (who is Lucy), and saying these words. He’s saying, *“Sorry I dropped that easy fly ball, manager; I thought I had it! But then I remembered all the other ones I dropped. I guess the past got in my eyes.”*

Sometimes we don’t really live today freely, because the past gets in our eyes. Sometimes we let the patterns of hurt or pain or disappointment or resentment hold us back from living today fully and freely. Sometimes we’re still reliving the past, and that is really not freedom.

So how well do you let go of the past? How well do you let go of grudges or mistakes or regrets? What are you having a hard time in your life letting go of right now? And I mean letting go in all of the different areas. Maybe letting go of some old dream that doesn’t serve you any longer. Maybe it’s letting go of some self-image of yourself that no longer serves you. Maybe it’s letting go of limiting beliefs. Letting go of some old story. Maybe it’s letting go of attachments. Maybe it’s letting go of expectations.

Sometimes we hold on so tightly we become very rigid and inflexible. And letting go is probably one of the most liberating things we can do. One of the hardest spiritual practices, but one of the most liberating and freeing practices! Because when we don’t let go, we trap ourselves and stay stuck in the past.

Great quote by Michael McLellan, that he said: *"You can't start the next chapter of your life if you keep re-reading the last one."* Besides staying stuck in the past, not letting go robs us of today. It robs us of the potential and the power and the joy and the possibilities of today: of being in the present. So when we let go of the past, it actually frees us – with energy and joy – to live fully in this present moment.

Letting go literally is one of the most powerful of all spiritual practices, because when we let go, it lightens us; it brightens us; it opens us; it frees us to live more – not just presently – but intuitively. We live more intuitively, because all these expectations and attachments aren't there! We're actually free to listen intuitively to what's the best thing in this moment. It actually helps us live life more in the flow, because we're not hooked or weighted down by the past in any way.

The Apostle Paul said these powerful words. He said, *"I die daily."* And what he's really saying is: Develop a daily practice of freedom. A daily practice of letting go of things that we pick up in the day. *"I die daily."* I am willing to let go of the stuff that I've picked up today – of the hurts, of the regrets – and I let it go as a regular, daily practice. Just like brushing our teeth; taking a shower: you're going to wash off the daily gunk. We do it physically; well, we need to do it emotionally and spiritually, as well. So to say: What is it that I need to let go of today? And then a beautiful line from Psalm 51; we follow it with, *"Create in me a clean heart, oh, Lord; and renew a right spirit within me."*

Seem, when we keep holding on, it is not the right spirit in us. We're holding on to things that are not for our highest good. But when we're willing to say, *"What am I supposed to let go of today? What are the things that I erase? And create in me a clean heart, oh, Lord, and renew a right spirit in me,"* we are getting back to the foundation of our freedom.

And then the final thing is that we're free to color our lives creatively and uniquely. You know, I saw a quote someone said something like, *"Paint on the canvas of your life anything you want."* And so there were some quotes that really got me excited about living more colorfully and living more creatively! And one of them said, *"Your life is a canvas; make sure you paint yourself a lot of colorful days."* [Laughs] I love that!

You know, I was reading some articles on the power of color in our lives: that bright, brilliant, beautiful colors can get us enthusiastic and excited. They can calm us. They can energize us. So how much color is in your life? There are all kinds of ways! Bring flowers into the house. Wear cool – Rev. Jimmie used to love these funky socks; he loved his colorful socks! You know, wear a bright-colored shirt. Like, bring color into your life; it will make it more vibrant and more alive! And sometimes just be more colorful: be more playful; be more joyful and silly in your life. It absolutely makes a difference! And this colorful idea that I'm talking about relates to the idea of *"To enter the kingdom of heaven we must become as a child."* Children are joyful and playful; they love bright colors! So what way can you make your life more colorful? You know, that you can brighten it up?

You know, George Bernard Shaw once said this. He said, *"We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing."* So bring some joyfulness, some color and brightness into your life, because you have the freedom to do that! And it's a wonderful gift that will bless us in amazing ways.

Another quote I found was ... It says, *"Happiness is letting go of what you think your life is supposed to be like, and celebrating it for everything that it is."* And I love that! We spend so much time chasing stuff; this is saying, *"Hey! Your life's great now! Your life is fabulous now! Your life is wonderful now!"* Celebrate everything that it is – not going to be, but is! And there are so much good going on in our lives! I love that line: *"This is the day that the Lord hath made; let us rejoice and be glad in it!"*

So what's good about your life? What's going well? What's good about being you? Because these are things we should be celebrating on a regular basis! Lighten and brighten, bring more color into our lives by just celebrating all the good and beauty that is going on in your life.

And the final quote I found that I loved; it says, *“The one thing that you have that nobody else has is you: your voice; your mind; your story; your vision. So write and draw and build and play and dance and live as only you can!”* The greatest gift that God has given us – and the greatest gift we can give the world – is be uniquely who we are! That our unique smile and our unique laugh and our unique beauty and talents and abilities shine brightly.

See, the more we can be comfortable in our skin, and be true to ourselves – and honor who we are and express all of ourselves in the most unique way – amazing things will happen.

So I went to Westdale Secondary School in Hamilton, Ontario. And two famous people who went to the same school were Martin Short and Eugene Levy. And, if you know these two, they are amazing comedic actors, and about as different as you could ever imagine! Eugene has got a dry sense of humor; he hardly changes expression on his face. I mean, it is amazing how hilarious he is. And Marty Short is about as flamboyant and active and playful and silly as you can imagine. They are so different! And, yet, it is their unique gifts of how they bring their talent, their comedy, and their ability that touches us so much. They don't try to be anyone else; they are uniquely who they are.

And while it's a Canadian comedy example – probably not the best example! – the truth is: In that same way, the greatest gift we can give is to be uniquely who we are. To share the love that we have in our heart in our unique way. To share our talents and our warmth and our abilities, and the way we express ourselves: our creativity. Sharing it in our own way is the greatest, most unique and wonderful way we can bless the world. And, you know what happens? Not only do we feel free being who we really are ... When we are free and express who we are freely, we give other people permission to be free in how they express themselves. One of the greatest gifts we can do is share our freedom by being truly who we are.

You know, sometimes in our life we're going to feel stuck. Sometimes in our lives we are going to feel trapped and we are going to feel limited. And it's not the truth! We are absolutely free! But sometimes we need to reconnect with the Source of our spiritual and inner freedom. By immersing our mind in the mind of God, we will feel and experience the foundation of real freedom. That will give us the permission to express our freedom to say *Yes!*” or *“No!.”*; the freedom to let go of the past; and the freedom to light up our lives with color, and to express the uniqueness of who we really are.

And that is the lesson from this week's song in the “Songs of Life”: the lessons from “Freedom.”

God bless you all!

OFFERING

Rev. Lori Fleming: It's that time in our service to give of our gifts and our tithes and our offerings. I invite you to hold your offering in your hand and repeat after me: *“Divine love, through me, blesses and multiplies all that I have, all that I give, and all that I receive.”* We know that each and every gift is blessed each and every way, each and every day, and that all of our tithes come together as good, out into the world, and that each giver is blessed: heaped up, pressed down and overflowing, for that is the Law. And so it is. And so we say thank you, God! Amen.

CLOSING

Rev. Lori Fleming: It's been great to be with you today; we're so glad you've caught us online. We look forward to seeing you next time. Take care!

And now listen to the choir singing the Peace Song.

Unity Choir (singing remotely):

Let there be peace on Earth;
And let it begin with me.
Let there be peace on Earth;
The peace that was meant to be.

With God as Creator,
Fam'ly all are we.
Let us walk with each other
In perfect harmony.

Let peace begin with me,
Let this be the moment now.
With ev'ry step I take,
Let this be my joyous vow:
To take each moment
And live each moment
In peace eternally.

Let there be peace on Earth;
And let it begin with me!

Rev. Lori Fleming: And now will you join me in the Prayer for Protection?
The light of God surrounds us;
The love of God enfolds us;
The power of God protects us;
And the presence of God watches over us.
Wherever we are, God is. And all is well!

Have a fabulous week!

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