

## Freedom Sermon

I am in the privileged position in the United States of being a white middle aged heterosexual woman of Western European ethnicity. In most situations I am not seen as a threat and am assumed to have good intentions, unlike many of my sisters and brothers who are othered. That said, I am still subject to the interpersonal and intrapsychic struggles with freedom. I think that's why I identified with the struggles of Black people, reading the Autobiography of Malcolm X as a 14 year old, and having empathy for those struggling with mental health and substance abuse problems. As a young child living in New York City, I witnessed people sleeping on the sidewalk and behaving in an odd and scary manner to a child. You see, I felt oppressed growing up with a volatile father who could be loving and encouraging one minute and critical and humiliating the next. I always felt his tension and consequently felt a sense of dis-ease and anxiety. Sometimes my self esteem was enhanced, but the next minute, torn down. As a result, I have struggled with feeling free within myself, particularly during stressful and emotionally demanding times. I tend to connect with self doubt and low self esteem at those times, making it difficult for me to change my attitude about myself, feeling entrapped by negative attributions of myself. At other times, I feel released from those negative self attributions and feel lighter and free to be myself and connect with the people and environment around me. It is during those times that my brain works most efficiently, and I am inspired by good will and creativity. I feel concerned about, and loving towards people. I enjoy problem

solving and using my creativity to enhance the richness of my experience.

At this moment I am feeling relatively free and at peace, despite all of the bad will and violence in the United States. I never could have imagined the world we are currently living in with authoritarian actions by the government and the back sliding into oppression and violence against the other. That is the problem right there; that we do not see ourselves as one people in an interconnected world with all living things. Our UU values emphasize the oneness of everything, which I hold dear. It is such a simple concept, yet there is such resistance to it, leading to a lack of freedom imposed on people and damage to the environment. I agree with Pastor Laura's remarks that we are not free as individuals unless everyone is free. I am not truly happy having what I need, seeing people suffer from violence, illegal imprisonment, lack of housing, adequate education, health and mental health care, and enough money to provide a decent standard of living for themselves. I think those who pursue more and more for themselves at the sacrifice of so many cannot be truly happy either. I do not want to live in a country where people are othered, and deprived of what they need to lead a life which would

allow them to be free to be themselves and add their gifts to the world. That is why I have become an activist and am supporting organizations which fight for everyone's rights. It has been uplifting to march with many people who are supporting a variety of causes which promote freedom and care for others and the earth. I had a particularly uplifting experience going to the May Day protest in Baltimore with my 27 yo son. We marched with the democracy/antifacism group along with mostly older white and gray haired people who have taken to the streets to make their voices heard. It is powerful to all chant together "This is what democracy looks like" while marching together, protesting an increasingly authoritarian government. It sends a message that the people do not agree with what the government is doing and have banded together to protest it. There were several other marches at the same time which all coalesced together in McKeldin Square across from the Inner Harbor. There were many speeches which included groups supporting the rights of immigrants, workers, students, and innocent civilian Palestinian adults and children. There was a call for the majority white protesters to fight for those in Baltimore who have historically suffered by living in communities racked with poverty, violence, poor schools, and environmental conditions leading to poor health, such as a high incidence of asthma in children. I can't believe that it would be okay with anyone to have so many people suffer due to income and environmental inequality. I think the pursuit of more and more wealth leads to chronic feelings of having to fill the emptiness of the soul. Perhaps those who are in positions of power and great wealth are not really free, but enslaved by their own emptiness, attempting to fill themselves up continuously to avoid the hole inside them. Wouldn't it be a much freer and better world if everyone had what they needed to shine and create a caring community which nurtured people and their gifts?