

**FREEDOM ENFOLDED IN RESPONSIBILITY**

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Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough

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**OPENING WORDS**    *Committed to Respond*    ~ Lynn Harrison

Committed to respond to the call of a wounded world...  
We join together this day with loving hearts, hands and minds.  
Embracing the interconnected web of water, air and earth...  
We light a fire of sustaining hope, ever bright with love and justice.  
May we bring forth this day new wisdom, strength and courage  
To create a new world not of wealth, but well-being.  
A world of new peace and abundance for all.  
As we give thanks for this earth, our shared and singular home,  
May we dedicate ourselves to its ongoing care.  
Rising to the calls deep within us, and all around us...  
May we respond today and always with courage and with love.

**STORY FOR ALL**    *The Little Red Hen (Makes a Pizza)*    ~ Philemon Sturges

*(In this re-telling of the old tale, the Little Red Hen makes a huge pizza (without help from the duck, the dog and the cat) but then invites them to eat it with her. After dinner, they all help with the cleanup.)*

**READING**    *Beyond the Zero-Sum Game*    ~ Nathan C. Walker

For centuries, insiders  
have been democratizing their religions.  
  
Incremental moments of institutional reform  
have led to a new era of theological enlightenment.  
  
From out of ancient times  
into the twilight of now,  
these reformers have made a sacred vow:  
to never mischaracterize freedom  
as a zero-sum game.  
  
True freedom is not jealous.  
True freedom is not envious.  
True freedom is not spiteful.  
  
True freedom does not desire  
to restrict the rights of others.  
True freedom knows not a selfish thought,

knows not how to threaten.

To sense true freedom is to know that  
your win is my glory and that  
your suffering is inextricably tied to my own.

For, the sum of all that is holy shines far beyond  
the tools of our evolving democracy--  
from party jingles to picket signs.

The sum of all that is holy is found  
in our collective desire to know freedom  
not as a political slogan,  
but as a way of life.

**MESSAGE**      *Freedom Enfolded in Responsibility*

For those of you who are bakers and cooks, you're probably familiar with the instructions sometimes given to 'fold' ingredients together. Cookbooks tell me that "folding" is a gentler mixing technique than stirring...a technique that it is generally used when one of the items has previously been whipped into fluffiness or where particular tenderness is desired.

I didn't have this baking technique in mind when I named this service... 'Freedom enfolded in Responsibility' ...but there is indeed a certain gentleness or care with which we treat our freedom, while responsibility has something of a harder consistency. Perhaps 'folding in' is indeed an apt metaphor. We protect our freedom and often shun our responsibility. We are inspired by freedom and weighted down by responsibility. In enfolded them, one might wonder if the goal is to make the responsibility lighter, or the freedom heavier, but I don't think it matters. They must be mixed together in order to get the results we desire...that is, accountable participation in a beloved world community that can both feed and inspire our souls. Or put another way, the goal of a beloved community met through the freely chosen participation of able hearts and hands.

I've said before from this pulpit that I generally, and rather ashamedly, have the personality of the Little Red Hen. You know the one. The self-sacrificing hard-working martyr, a bit too mired in ideas of hard-earned rights, and sometimes even resentful of pulling more than my weight (which as you can see, is no small thing!) I'm grateful to be corrected in my thinking by old stories re-written into better messages...such as we heard earlier... reminding me that the goal of 'eating together' is more important than who does the work.

And yet. And yet. Somebody has to do the work. And no matter how saintly they may be, sometimes the workers burn out, or get resentful, or worst of all, lose heart and give up. And that breaks my heart.

I know...it's hard to talk about responsibility without conjuring up that annoying Little Red Hen...along with her whiney and guilt-inducing energy. While I 'do' Little Red Hen well, I truly am not always that character. Sometimes I'm the one who's ducking my head and running, or the one in much need of rest, hoping that there'll be some food for me anyway. Like you, I understand and know guilt.

Guilt is not a very comfortable place, but that doesn't mean we should avoid it. Brené Brown<sup>1</sup>, in *Rising Strong* (the NonFiction Bookclub read this month) says that guilt is a powerful and healthy motivator for change. We get guilt confused with shame, she says. Where shame tells us that *we* are bad, guilt simply tells us that we haven't been accountable in our actions, and that our behaviour could be improved if we want to better live in alignment with our values.

Since returning from my sabbatical, I have made a commitment to speak my truth as authentically as possible. In a sermon in April, I said that I often feel that I am doing this work...that is, the building up and upholding of this community...your community...alone. I don't say this as a whine, but as a reality. It's how I feel. But more concerning to me is what I notice in your leaders...your Board, your committee chairs, your nominating committee...when THEY feel alone in the work...when we search high and low for Board members and can't find them...when our teams are so small that the work load is too much...when our *esprit de corps* is damaged or broken by disappointment and feelings of abandonment. No one wants to feel that what they care about is of little importance to others.

Should you feel guilty about that? It depends. If you're one of our current leaders, or one of the folks who shows up to help no matter what, then of course not! And, if you have carefully made decisions about the level of your involvement based in what is most important to you, then there is also no reason to feel guilt. You're living authentically. But, if this community is important to you, if its existence and the support of its leaders matters to you, and if you are able but are not stepping up, then feeling some guilt may actually help you to consider what you'd like to change.

We are always, each of us, trying to balance the many demands in our lives. It seems that ALL of those demands are vying for first place...to win our attention, our energy, our resources. The reality is that this congregation is just one of those myriad demands; in the long run, it only exists because it is important enough to enough people to keep it afloat.

Even within this congregation, there are competing demands...when you get a chance, look at Scott's president's report in our Annual Report. He lists there our committee chairs and leaders of various initiatives. And it should be noted that each of those teams has 3-6 additional members. The list doesn't include everything...for example, folks put in time

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<sup>1</sup> pp. 194-198

rehearsing and singing or playing music for us, or washing linens, or making salads for community meals, or being a welcome volunteer... we are doing SO much together, and each person MUST be able to freely determine what they are able to do, and where they prefer to serve, given their abilities and resources.

So what can I say to help you settle into this reality...and be able to hold both things in tension...? That is, on the one hand, the reality of many competing demands and our confusion about how to manage them...and on the other, the call to show up here in ways that create and maintain a sustainable and relevant community for all?

Here we affirm and promote the democratic process...and not the democracy that would have individuals vote, with their hands and feet and wallets, in a self-serving way, but the kind of democracy already named in this service...

In our opening words, there was a call to join together to create a new world not of wealth, but well-being, a world of peace and abundance for all. In the reading about a zero-sum game, there was a reminder that true freedom is to know that your win is my glory and that your suffering is inextricably tied to my own. We are in this together...that is, if we choose to be in this together. I am moved by the saying that three wolves and a sheep do not a democracy make... just as three 'eaters' and one 'cook' do not a shared ministry make.

Listen. I say this with all tenderness. If you are really not able to give more than you do, and if you need to simply show up here and soak up whatever inspiration and comfort you can, I want you to know that your need is exactly one of the reasons this community exists, and one of the reasons that others give. We want you to be able to come here and be fed. A true, shared-ministry, in-it-together, democracy does not expect equal service for equal pay. The beloved community does not demand 'fair' participation in order to be shown dignity and compassion, or to have a place at the table.

And, the grace present, the gift, is that those who currently have the resources to do so, step forward to make a true, freedom-loving, freedom-serving democracy possible. It takes all of us to show up for all of us.

Each week we say that we make our covenant with this beloved community in freedom. Freely chosen community. And then we go on to say that our covenant includes caring for our earth, serving the family of humanity, and cherishing each other as friends... freely chosen responsibilities.

Beautiful language, this. Does it need to be clearer? Do we need to say explicitly that we can't fully care for one another without facilitators who serve on our Circle of Care? That we can't sponsor refugees without volunteers to make their settlement successful and donors to cover the expenses? That we can't be a charitable organization poised to serve and support its

members and its systems without a functioning Board of Directors? That we can't have coffee on Sunday unless someone comes in a bit early to make it? To say all of that, and more, would make for a very clunky covenant indeed.

There's a story in Thich Nhat Hanh's book, *The Miracle of Mindfulness*,<sup>2</sup> which is our read for June. He tells of a man who was bemoaning all the demands on his time, and feeling resentful of the times that he had to do something around the house, or help his son with homework, or put in an extra hour at work. And then something shifted in him. He realized that all of his time was his time, and that no matter how he spent it... assuming he spent it on things that were important to him... was his time. His time to be enjoyed. His time to be present to the people and projects he loved. His time to be in service of things that mattered to him. And with that awareness, he was then able to let go of the resentment he had felt when he tried to divide his time into parts. With just a slight shift in perspective, he truly has unlimited time for himself.

It is all ours, my friends. Everything we do can be done in the spirit of service to the beloved communities of which we are a part... be it family, or neighbourhood, or social justice group, or city, or this particular community of faith.

It is in the service of what matters that we are set free. It is in the process of gently, but profoundly, folding our freedom into our responsibilities that we see that we have unlimited ability to rise together. Unlimited potential to be fed and to feed each other.

In freedom and in peace, in freedom and responsibility, may it be so.

**\*CLOSING WORDS** *Irrational Belonging* (with a nod to Madeleine L'Engle)

Ultimately there comes a moment when we must decide.

We must decide how much risk we are willing to take for the good of the whole.

How much risk? Surely, to risk is to fear.

Yet we must decide if the good of the whole is worth risking our vulnerability, risking our comfort, risking our security.

It is the nature of love to create something new together; it is a risk because in that creation, in giving of ourselves, we perceive that there will be loss.

To love in this way is the biggest risk a human being can take.

And to love in this way is no way a rejection of freedom; rather it is the full embrace of freedom to dare to make a decision to stand by our highest values.

To fully participate, whole-heartedly, is to answer the call of love, that we may create together that of which we dream.

May it be so. May it be so. May it be so.

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<sup>2</sup> p.2