

## Words of Welcome

Freedom. Just saying that word brings different images and experience to people depending on their world view and life. Not surprisingly, the word has meaning for Christians as well. Join me in this time of worship.

## Call to Worship

In deep gratitude we come to worship God.

**We recognize God as the source of all goodness.**

All good gifts come from the Spirit of God:

**love, peace, joy, patience, kindness, gentleness are all of God.**

We come with grateful hearts, not for things, but for who God is.

**We gather to show our gratitude in song and prayer.**

~posted on *The Presbyterian Church in Canada* website. <http://presbyterian.ca/>

## Hymn

*Breathe on me, breath of God*

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| 1. Breathe on me, breath of God;<br>fill me with life anew,<br>that I may love what thou dost love<br>and do what thou wouldst do. | 2. Breathe on me, breath of God,<br>until my heart is pure,<br>until with thee I will one will<br>to do and to endure. |
| 3. Breathe on me, breath of God,<br>till I am wholly thine,<br>until this earthly part of me<br>glows with thy fire divine.        | 4. Breathe on me, breath of God,<br>so shall I never die,<br>but live with thee the perfect life<br>of thine eternity. |

Words and music: public domain

## Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Faithful, fruitful God,  
you created our minds to grow in wisdom.  
You created our hearts to expand with love.  
You created our voices to sing your praises forever.  
We bring you our worship with joyful praise,  
turning to Jesus for grace and guidance.  
Fill us to overflowing with your Holy Spirit  
so that the fruit of the Spirit will bound in our lives.

**Faithful, fruitful God,  
you call us to follow you, whatever the circumstance,  
yet we confess we prefer to remain where we are.  
You offer us new beginnings,  
yet we continue to make the same choices,  
guided by our own desires.**

**We make excuses for avoiding your challenge to change.**

**Forgive us, O God.**

**Cleanse us with your mercy,**

**and energize us to serve you even when the challenge seems great.**

**God of wisdom,**

**by your Spirit, open our minds to your truth, our hearts to your gospel, and our hands so that we can do your will. May we worship you in spirit and in truth,**

**and serve you in the example of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.**

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## **Assurance of Forgiveness**

In Christ, we are made a new creation;

the old life is gone and the new life has come!

Know that God loves you and forgives you.

Do not be afraid to make a new start!

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## **Scripture Reading Galatians 5:1,13-25**

Christ has set us free to live a free life. So take your stand! Never again let anyone put a harness of slavery on you.

<sup>13-15</sup> It is absolutely clear that God has called you to a free life. Just make sure that you don't use this freedom as an excuse to do whatever you want to do and destroy your freedom. Rather, use your freedom to serve one another in love; that's how freedom grows. For everything we know about God's Word is summed up in a single sentence: Love others as you love yourself. That's an act of true freedom. If you bite and ravage each other, watch out—in no time at all you will be annihilating each other, and where will your precious freedom be then?

<sup>16-18</sup> My counsel is this: Live freely, animated and motivated by God's Spirit. Then you won't feed the compulsions of selfishness. For there is a root of sinful self-interest in us that is at odds with a free spirit, just as the free spirit is incompatible with selfishness. These two ways of life are contrary to each other, so that you cannot live at times one way and at times another way according to how you feel on any given day. Why don't you choose to be led by the Spirit and so escape the erratic compulsions of a law-dominated existence.

<sup>19-21</sup> It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time: repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; ugly parodies of community. I could go on.

This isn't the first time I have warned you, you know. If you use your freedom this way, you will not inherit God's kingdom.

<sup>22-23</sup> But what happens when we live God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard—things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely.

<sup>23-24</sup> Legalism is helpless in bringing this about; it only gets in the way. Among those who belong to Christ, everything connected with getting our own way and mindlessly responding to what everyone else calls necessities is killed off for good—crucified.

<sup>25-26</sup> Since this is the kind of life we have chosen, the life of the Spirit, let us make sure that we do not just hold it as an idea in our heads or a sentiment in our hearts, but work out its implications in every detail of our lives.

The Message (MSG) Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

## **Message** Freedom

The word “freedom” gets tossed around a lot today. I think the most striking and recent example of this would have been as we watched the “freedom convoy” cross Canada and occupy the streets of Ottawa in the area around the Parliament buildings. The word freedom was chanted over and over again. Depending upon your feelings around this you might have felt it an affirmation of your understanding of what that means to be free or it may have felt more like an intimidation chant meant to bring fear and division.

Christians were divided as to what freedom in the context of the pandemic meant and this division continues in our faith and in our families. Governments are seen by groups of people, both here in Canada and elsewhere in the world, as those robbing people of their freedoms. And there is much to be said about how we are governed. Power, no matter who has the power, is often corrupted, and there are examples of that in every age.

This message is not intended to judge activism or understanding when people are at odds or in disagreement, but to place our focus on what is meant when we speak about freedom as Christians. How do we discern when we are living freely, as people who pray that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven?

The Apostle Paul, in writing the letter to the Galatians, has something to say to us about that. Now a little context can be helpful. Paul is writing to a community that is in crisis. It might not seem like a big deal, but after Paul left them to continue his ministry in other communities, people with ideas about requirements to be an even better Christian, to have more physical signs of being a good Christian, had come and were perverting the gospel that Paul had preached in which there would be no second-class citizens. All people were free in Christ because of what God had done, not because of anything the individual or community of faith might do to earn more credibility or clout.

At this point in the letter, Paul is setting before people two ways of life, and “they are contrary to each other, so that you cannot live at times one way and at times another way according to how you feel on any given day.” (v 16-18)

The challenge is between a law-dominated existence and freedom. Examples of this kind of law-dominated existence are self-focused, it leads to “divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; ugly parodies of community” (v19-21) and this is only a part of the troubles.

In the conversations that have been a part of our Canadian context over the last two years, there has been a lot of talk and division between people, and it has been most painful to see in how Christians have used the Christian faith to make their points or to somehow say this is how things should be.

But as Christians we should be the first to listen to try to understand why someone is reacting or choosing as they are. I can't help but hear the line from the familiar hymn, “they'll know we are Christians by our love” and think, but what love are we demonstrating as Christians to a world that is already so divided and hurting, when so many Christians are quick to use their faith as the grounds for which to dismiss the thoughts, actions, and life of others?

Christ's love was sacrificial to the point of death. Can we not at least sacrifice for one another so that people live free of condemnation, judgement, and fear? This conversation played out in the context of such things as opposition to government mandates, but extends to our conversations around truth and reconciliation with our Indigenous communities, with the LGBTQI2S+ families, and into things beyond our borders, like giving aid to countries and helping refugees find hope and life without fear in our own country.

How do we live into our Christian freedom in all of these contexts and conversations, claiming that freedom for ourselves as well as extending it in love to others? As Eugene Peterson in *The Message* questions and then answers, “But what happens when we live God's way? [God] brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard – things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely.” (v22-23)<sup>1</sup>

Carla Works, in her commentary, says it this way, “So how will the Galatians know that they are indeed a people being transformed—a people of the promise, children of God, clothed in Christ? Because they are a people who bear one another's burdens, love one another, as Christ has loved them. They are a people whose actions are marked by the

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<sup>1</sup> [The Message \(MSG\)](#) Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by [Eugene H. Peterson](#)

shape of the cross rather than their own selfish desires. They are fulfilling the intention of the law—to love their neighbors.”<sup>2</sup>

In an age where people are self-centered and self-focused, the living into this freedom will seem alien and contrary to everything that society and culture says we have a right to. This does not mean that we dismiss conflict or neglect to attend to justice, but it does mean that we do not look at it from the perspective of personal gain. Being able to struggle with questions and conversations in a safe and vulnerable way is important. Personal attacks or even generalized attacks on those who believe or behave differently than we think is “Christian” or otherwise, does not have a place in Christian discourse because then we cannot be vulnerable to one another.

Vulnerable Christian community, not limited to our own church but in the broadest sense of Christian community, means feeling safe enough to share our hopes and understandings, but with full regard for another’s humanity, safety, and security. Taking into account the needs of the most vulnerable among us, making sure their needs are met first. It doesn’t matter if you think they are deserving of such care, our faith demands it of us. We are not the judge, we are the vessels that Christ’s uses so that love can flow out from us as individuals and as Christian community, into the streets of our town, cities, highways, and places of government.

And, “Since this is the kind of life we have chosen, the life of the Spirit, let us make sure that we do not just hold it as an idea in our heads or a sentiment in our hearts, but work out its implications in every detail of our lives.” (v25-26).

May we know that the Spirit goes with us, as guide, as wisdom, as counselor and reminder of all Christ said and did in his life. All this we access through prayer, worship, study of scripture, through conversation and in community.

Freely live in the Spirit of Jesus, as we grow in understanding, knowledge, wisdom, and faith, loving others into wholeness and inclusion. Amen.

### **Prayers of the People**

God of mystery and mercy, God of our past and our future,  
We come before you today carrying all the hopes and dreams,  
and the burdens and blessings of our lives.

We bring all that is on our hearts and minds to you today,  
grateful for the goodness, seeking your comfort and strength,  
listening for your guidance.

God of purpose and promise, Receive our prayers.

God of life and love,

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<sup>2</sup> [Carla Works. Commentary on Galatians 5:1, 13-25 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#)

Accessed June 24, 2022

You engage us in the midst of our lives when we need you.  
We pray today for all those who feel fearful about their future,  
and for all who wrestle with challenges at work or at home.  
We remember before you those weighed down by illness or worry,  
and all who provide care for those in need of support.

*Keep silence for 15 seconds.*

Help each one of us face our fears and our challenges supported by your love.

God of courage and comfort,  
whenever we wrestle with any burden,  
your Spirit prays within us with sighs too deep for words.  
Today we pray for all those whose burdens seem too heavy to bear:  
For the victims of violence or disaster, and for their friends and families... *(pause)*  
For refugees at risk in so many places in the world,  
remembering especially those who have fled Ukraine and Afghanistan... *(pause)*  
We pray for those caught in despair and poverty in our own community  
and in the forgotten corners of your world... *(pause)*  
Renew the strength of all those challenged by realities beyond their control  
and equip our leaders to support those in the deepest need.

God of the world and all its peoples,  
we pray for our country and our leaders as we prepare to mark Canada Day.  
Equip Canada to be a force for justice and well-being in your world.  
Give our leaders wisdom and integrity to make decisions  
that provide for a good future for all who call this nation home.  
Open our eyes and our hearts to the opportunities we have  
to serve you in serving one another.  
Make us alert to cries for justice in our midst  
and guide us in repairing relationships strained by differences between us.  
Receive all our prayers, spoken and unspoken, as together we pray the words Jesus  
taught us:

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## Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.**

## Invitation to the offering

According to the Apostle Paul, the fruit of the Spirit includes kindness and generosity, gifts of God we enjoy. As we present our offering, may the Spirit fill us with generosity, and multiply our kindness for the sake of Christ our Lord.

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## Hymn

*Brother, sister, let me serve you*

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| 1. Brother, sister, let me serve you;<br>let me be as Christ to you;<br>pray that I may have the grace<br>to let you be my servant too.            | 2. We are pilgrims on a journey,<br>and companions on the road;<br>we are here to help each other<br>walk the mile and bear the load.                     |
| 3. I will hold the Christ-light for you<br>in the night-time of your fear;<br>I will hold my hand out to you,<br>speak the peace you long to hear. | 4. I will weep when you are weeping;<br>when you laugh I'll laugh with you;<br>I will share your joy and sorrow,<br>Till we've seen this journey through. |
| 5. When we sing to God in heaven,<br>we shall find such harmony,<br>born of all we've known together<br>of Christ's love and agony.                | 6. Brother, sister, let me serve you;<br>let me be as Christ to you;<br>pray that I may have the grace to<br>let you be my servant too.                   |

"Brother, sister, let me serve you," words by Richard Gillard © 1993 Scripture in Song,  
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## **Benediction** (inspired by Philippians 1: 6-11 and Galatians 5: 22-23)

May God, who began a good work in you,  
continue to be at work in your life,  
guiding, teaching and equipping you  
until Jesus Christ returns.

May your love and compassion continue to grow—  
a love that is full of knowledge and wise insight,  
so that you will be able to recognize what really matters,  
and live a pure and blameless life.

May you live a life centered in the Holy Spirit,  
a life that bears rich fruit –  
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,  
generosity, faithfulness, tolerance and self-control –  
all the good things that come from following the Spirit,  
for living this way will bring much glory and praise to God.

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