

**THREE
SERMONS
ABOUT
FREEDOM**

FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH
OF WORCESTER, MA

REV. THOMAS R. SCHADE

“THE FREE MIND”
“THE FREE CHURCH”
“THE FREE COMMUNITY”

JANUARY 7-FEBRUARY 21, 2010

THE FREE MIND

William Ellery Channing

From the sermon "Spiritual Freedom" 1830

#592 Singing the Living Tradition

I call that mind free which masters the senses, and which recognizes its own reality and greatness: which passes life, not in asking what it shall eat or drink, but in hungering, thirsting, and seeking after righteousness. I call that mind free which jealously guards its intellectual rights and powers, 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 is not passively framed by outward circumstances, and is not the creature of accidental impulse: which discovers everywhere the radiant signatures of the infinite spirit, and in them finds help to its own spiritual enlargement.

I call that mind free which protects itself against the usurpations of society, and which does not cower to human opinion: which refuses to be the slave or tool of the many or other few, and guards its empire over itself as nobler than the empire of the world.

I call that mind free which resists the bondage of habit, which does not mechanically copy the past, nor lives its old virtues; but which listens for new and

higher monitions of conscience, and rejoices to pour itself forth in fresh and higher exertions.

I call that mind free which sets no bounds to its love, which, wherever they are, delights in virtue and sympathizes with suffering: which recognizes in all human beings the image of God and the rights of God's children and offers itself up a willing sacrifice the cause of humankind.

I call that mind free which has cast off all fear but that of wrongdoing, and which no menace or peril can enthrall: which is calm in the midst of tumults, and possesses itself, though all else be lost

THE FREE MIND

Originally: Forward Through the Ages
Sermon of January 7, 2010

What are your plans and hopes for yourself for the coming decade?

In the journey of life, a new decade stretches before us. No matter how far off the final horizon seems to be, it now seems that we can look back and measure off a certain distance, and look ahead that same distance. We can look back and see the year 2000 so far back there, and just this side of it, the Twin Towers burning -- once they filled the sky and now they seem much smaller -- and we see the long road we have traveled since. For me, ten years ago I had just arrived here in Worcester, a new minister, starting a second, (or was it a third?) career. Sue started her present job on January 1, 2000. Where were you?

And now we can, at least in our mind, measure off a similar length of time, and project into the future. We can peer down the long road we are traveling and see a little road mark far ahead marked 2020. At least many of us can. For some of us, the shining ribbon of highway climbs into the mountains and slips over the far horizon before we can see any such road sign marked.

But look ahead and imagine you and yours in the next 10 years. Imagine your children 10 years older; the babies now squirming through the service will be late into grammar school, bright and beautiful, the kids in sixth grade will be in college or even graduates, coming back for the Christmas eve service and to reconnect with old friends.

What will it be for you? What are your hopes? What do you want to be doing, who will you be with, what kind of person will you be? I assume that you will want to be happy, contented with your life, fulfilled, but what will make for that kind of happiness in your life?

Beyond hoping for what everybody hopes for: --health for yourself and the ones you love, and whatever marks a comfortable lifestyle for you--, you hope for is a life lit by an inner light, a life that is authentic to you, driven by your purpose and best intentions, a life that is responsible to the people and the planet on which you depend, but still the life that you choose.

“The life you choose.” Did I just say that? Don’t they say you don’t get to choose your life – *“life is what happens to you while you are making other plans”*, the song says. (John Lennon in 1980). Not totally true.

You do get to -- indeed, you have to -- choose how you respond the changing circumstances of your life. But the temptation not to choose, to drift, is strong.

This is a spiritual question: One of the my core beliefs is that the spirit is a muscle, and like all muscles it gets stronger when it is worked, and the work of the spirit is choosing. Choosing where to spend our time, choosing how to spend our money, choosing with whom we companion, choosing when to speak and when to keep silent, choosing what to eat, when to fight and when to walk away. "For everything there is a season, a time for every matter under heaven"; when our spirit is strong we know what time it is, and what is appropriate for this moment, and this is the most important part, to have the courage and self-possession to act on that knowledge.

To get through the coming decade in life, to make it to 2020 and to find ourselves in a good place, we will each have to cultivate a way of thinking and a way of being that is calm and open and tolerant and reverent and grateful.

In short, the decade calls us to cultivate what William Ellery Channing calls in our responsive reading today, "The Free Mind."

Of all the readings in this book, I chose this one, "the Free Mind" for the first Sunday of the first year of a new decade. Yes, it is 180 years old, (It comes from a Channing Sermon entitled "Spiritual Freedom" that was preached in 1830 - I have posted a link to the original sermon on the Church's Facebook page) but I think that it explains clearly the call of Liberal Religion. If evangelical Christianity calls upon the people to accept Christ as their Savior, then Liberal Religion calls upon the people to the cultivate a Free mind.

It is our call to conversion, and it is a call that to make the world at large, to our wider community, to each other in our covenanted community of the congregation, and to ourselves in the privacy of our own personal self-reflections, meditations and prayers.

In this piece, Channing calls us to free our mind of four habits of thinking that will stand in the way of living into our visions for 2020, and these are the personal tasks of transformation that Liberal Religion asks of you.

First: Free your mind from a single-minded focus on the work of survival. Yes, eating and drinking are important. I read many of your Facebook status updates and I appreciate the joy that people derive from cooking good food for one's family, for baking treats with the children. And I appreciate that none of us can ignore the necessity of work and tending to one's economic well-being and survival. If you are looking for work, a job can seem like the very gates of heaven. But we all know, and we all forget, that this realm of life is not all there is, that we are capable of so much more, that we will not be fulfilled until we live a life in balance, what Channing calls a life of righteousness.

Second: Liberal Religion asks you to free your mind from its bondage to the past, the ideas and worldviews you have passively inherited, the mental habits, the pride over your past achievements and the shame about your inadequacies and past failures.

Channing and that generation of religious liberals lived and worked in an age before the psychological insights of the later 19th and 20th century. So, they tended to think that our personalities were shaped by the content of what we thought. Now, we favor the theory that what we think is shaped by our personalities.

Their critique of Calvinism was that its thoughts about the ultimate depravity of humanity and predestination shaped the believer into a depressed, fatalistic and passive person. Now, we are more inclined to say that depressed, fatalistic and passive persons seek out faiths and religions that express what they already feel. And this is true, but only to an extent; if we believed in it 100%, we would not bother to have a Sunday School, would we?

In today's more psychologically oriented era, to free the mind is not only to put aside outworn dogma, and obsolete opinions, and antique ideologies, but also to become aware of, and to move toward overcoming, all the mental habits, compulsions, demons, and fixations that we are barely conscious of, all our stuff.

Third: Channing, and Liberal Religion and this Church (which, of course, was already 45 years old when Channing wrote *Spiritual Freedom*) charge us with the responsibility of protecting our minds from what he calls the "usurpations of society", and to break ourselves of the habit of "cowering to human opinion."

Now, none of those do that, do we? None of us would ever admit to being a follower of fad and fashion, a conformist? What would people think?

But the scapegoat instinct in the human being is very strong. And there will be a time in the next ten years when you will be in a situation when the group you are in is uniting itself against an outsider, and you will need to stand up and disagree. Even if it is just to say, "I don't share your prejudices" or to say, "that joke is not funny, but hateful."

And the human instinct to "herd" is very strong. There will be a time in the next ten years when a group is huddling together, facing inward instead of outward. It could well be this congregation. A time when everyone is more focused on making each other feel safe and comfortable instead of facing the challenges of change and conflict. Will you then cower to human opinion?

And fourthly and finally, Channing, this church and Liberal Religion, and this minister call upon you to free your mind from the prejudices and stereotypes that keep you from being "open to the light whencesoever it may come and able to receive new truth as an angel from heaven." Free your mind from all that gets in the way of your recognition in all human beings the image of God and rights of all God's children."

And let us look at the last words of Channing: *I call that mind free, which has cast out all fear, but that of wrongdoing, and which no menace or peril can enthrall: which is calm in the midst of tumult and possesses itself, though all else be lost.*

The free mind possesses itself. It has self-possession, or what Rabbi Friedman calls self-differentiation. The person with a free mind knows that he or she is a different person than others. The person with a free mind has self-knowledge, and is thus able to have a balanced relationship with others. The person with the free mind is able to disagree without being an enemy. The person with a free mind can consider another's opinion without being threatened. The person with a free mind is able to see that another person's experience may have led them to a different understanding. The people with a free mind do not see every situation as being about themselves. The marks of a free mind are calmness and playfulness and maturity.

Rabbi Edwin H. Friedman, a Reformed Jew and a Religious Liberal, argues that our entire culture is emotionally regressing, becoming more anxious and tense, and less able to nurture creative self-possessed individuals. He sees it in the zero-sum polarization of the political system. It's in our reactivity: our suspicion of leaders, our willingness to make opponents and rivals into enemies, the ways that people are so easily annoyed and irritated by others, our tribalism, and in the skittering way that we flit from one fad and obsession to another in the popular culture. Every week there is a new hate-object. This week we all hate the guy who tried to blow up the plane in Detroit, (which seems a reasonable stance), but last week we all hated Tiger Woods who apparently was the only guy in the country who cheats on his wife, and before that it was that couple who crashed a White House state dinner and before that it was the guy who fooled us with boy in the bubble stunt and before that it was the woman who had the nerve to have eight kids at once. Anxious groups go looking for people to hate and berate. It's like junior high kids, who are just learning how to fit into a social group, so they are very anxious, so they pick on the kid who dresses funny. It's not good when your culture as a whole seems to be acting on the emotional level of a middle school.

We are an anxious and nervous culture moving into the new decade. The economy is worrisome and the energy and environmental situation is worrisome. We are coming to grips with the fact that as a country we are much more diverse and much different from each other than what the majority has thought. Folks feel like their walking on eggshells more and more. We are learning that our past is not all glorious, but includes some ugly and shameful acts of bigotry and exploitation. Half of what we have always thought is out of date and we don't know which half. It's a nerve-wracking world, and when people are nervous, they regress into herding and scapegoating and overreaction.

Into this confusion, into this culture, Liberal Religion issues its call to conversion. I want to say, following Channing, that Liberal Religion calls upon us to "free our minds" but that phrase sounds so hippie-dippy, wavy-gravy, so psychedelic flower-powerish. So let me say it this way:

We are saying to you, and everyone else: grow into yourself, realize the power of your own intelligence and wisdom, find the calm that comes from self-awareness, develop the playfulness that comes from taking the long view, Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

“I CALL THAT CHURCH FREE”

James Luther Adams.

#591 Singing the Living Tradition

I call that church free which enters into covenant with the ultimate source of existence, that sustaining and transforming power not made with human hands.



It binds together families and generations, protecting against the idolatry of any human claim to absolute truth or authority.

This covenant is the charter and responsibility of joy of worship in the face of death as well as life.

I call that church free which brings individuals into a caring, trusting fellowship, that protects and nourishes their integrity and spiritual freedom; that yearns to belong to the church universal; it is open to insight and conscience from every source; it bursts through rigid tradition, giving rise to new and living language, to new and broader fellowship.

It is a pilgrim church, a servant church, on an adventure of the spirit.

The goal is the prophethood and priesthood of all believers, the one for the liberty of prophesying, the other for the ministry of healing.

It aims to find unity in diversity under the promptings of the spirit “that bloweth where it listeth...and maketh all things new.”

“THE FREE CHURCH”

Originally “Free For What?”

Sermon of January 30, 2010

A month ago, we read together: I call that Mind Free, by William Ellery Channing.

I said then that Liberal Religion makes a call to conversion to people to cultivate a free mind. It is a call that you have begun to answer. Each of you has a story. Liberal Religion calls us to cultivate a free mind, calls us to take possession of one’s own mind and to practice thinking for ourselves.

Two weeks ago, the last time I preached for you, we looked at the young adulthood of Martin Luther King, Jr. We read his life as a story of a man claiming his own life as his own. And I asserted that there is world changing creative energy released when a person starts thinking for himself. It is the call that Liberal Religion makes.

It is a call to a different life, and to a lifetime of work. There are layers and layers of stuff that must be worked through to cultivate the power to think and act for one-self.

There are the outmoded and antiquated theories and theologies, ideas and ideologies, that were passed down to you and that you accepted without question: the childhood faith, the unthinking patriotism, and the conventional wisdom.

There are all the ways that your thinking has been shaped by prejudices of the culture: the ways that you were told that there was something lesser about you: you weren’t of the right people, you didn’t look right, your skin, your hair, your weight, your opinion did not count for some reason, or your opinion could be predicted or assumed. You can’t have a free mind when it has been forced into a constant defensive posture.

And if you can say that you were never diminished, then you need to learn how to free your mind from the effects of such good luck, including the illusion that that’s the way life really is, and the assumption that somehow you deserved such good fortune.

And going deeper, there are all the assumptions that result from our gender and sexuality, a lot system of social relations that shaped our thought and thinking that is crumbling before our eyes.

And going even deeper, there are the mental habits and perspectives that come from your childhood, the obsessions and the compulsions, the old stories that you impose on every situation, the way that you always seem to find your mother and your father your sister and your brother every where you go, that every place you go you find you been there before.

All of this stuff, you can't get rid of it; you can't pretend it's not there. You have to think your way through it, get it into perspective, and learn that it's not the way that everybody else is thinking.

The desire for a free mind is not universal, but it widespread. There are lots of people in the world who are content to never question the opinions others, and are never tempted to question themselves, asking "Do I really believe that which I think?"

But those who seek to claim themselves as the author of their own thoughts, and to live an examined life, are everywhere, speaking every language, going to every church.

They are people of every ethnicity, people who love every sort of other people. They listen to every kind of music; they are of every age and every economic circumstance.

They have different needs: this one wants to re-think the religious dogma of their childhood; that one needs a job and wants to avoid falling into despair before he finds one; another ones wants to stay sober; another wants to wake within her children a sense of wonder and a fierce curiosity; someone else needs a oasis of peace.

Someone needs a place to make music; someone else needs a friend and yet another needs someone to affirm them and their love. But all of them need not just the respect of others, but are digging down to claim themselves, to rest themselves on the bedrock of their own authenticity.

They want to be the subject of their own story.

How about you? What is it that calls to you? What are you seeking? It is more than the music, and more than the Sunday school and I know that it is more than me and my words, except as ways to be and grow into yourself in some deeper way.

A Free Church calls everyone within the sound of its voice to undertake a journey of self-discovery. Its purpose is to issue the invitation and to be a place where the work can be done and to be a supportive community for those who seek the work.

If Channing describes the personal self-transformation that is the goal of Liberal Religion; James Luther Adams describes the work of the Free Church as calling together people for that work of transformation.

James Luther Adams describes four works of the church in his piece, ways in which the church helps individuals cultivate a free mind, and give them a context in which to express it.

1. The first is in that phrase: "It enters into a covenant with the ultimate source of existence." It creates a community in which we are asked to see our personal lives in the largest context.

We do not free our minds by thinking only about the things that we have control over: what shall I have for dinner? What shall I do today?

The Free mind grows in dialogue with all that we do not have control over: the past we did not make, the destiny that we do not choose, the truth that remains whether we choose to recognize it or not, the unfolding processes of life and death itself, and social history that sweep us along.

We grow the power of our self when we look at everything we don't have control over, and instead of bemoaning our fate, or complaining, or giving up, we remember that we can still choose the way that we will respond in the situations where we are powerless.

So the heart of the free church is our free worship: a community ritual which is designed to promote the essential work of personal self-reflection. A beautiful and serene setting, excellent music, words and rituals, and you think that your mind wanders – actually it starts to think over what is going on in your life, and you makes room for you to choose how you will respond to all those things that are perplexing and over which you have little control.

2. The Free Church protects its people from all human claims of absolute power and authority. It invites us to confront everything that is greater than us without surrendering our own powers, and without abandoning our search for truth. All churches ask us to worship God, but it is the Free Church that asks to worship God while still loving the truth.

3. The Free Church brings us as individuals in caring and trusting relationships, to feel the bonds of kinship and find ourselves within the universal human community. It is the school for learning how to be as Channing says, “open to light whencesoever it may come” and to “set[s] no bonds to its love” and to “recognizes in all human beings the image of God.”

4. The Free Church invites on an adventure of the spirit, to be a pilgrim church, breaking through rigid tradition, and seeking new language and new ritual. In other words the Free Church does not stand, it moves. It is not an unchanging point of stillness in an ever-turning world, but something that moves along, into the future.

The committee that is planning our 225th anniversary celebration has a banner, which they will hang on the front columns of the church. The message of the banner says “225 Years of Spiritual Freedom” and it invites everyone to come along for the next 225 years.

People with Free Minds and Free churches embrace their history, rather than being captive to their history. We embrace it all, the good, the bad, the times when we now think that the church should have done something different in the past. But we shall choose what to do in the future.

Today at our annual meeting, the Strategic Planning Committee is proposing that we discuss our vision for the year 2015, which will be about the year that I would retire if you choose to keep me here after Rev. Merritt retires.

They propose that we set as our number one goal for the next five years, the engagement and empowerment of the next generation of Religious Liberals here in Worcester and Central Massachusetts.

And by the next generation they mean people who are now in their late twenties to early forties. They say that we need to shape our church and programs to meet their needs, and to bring them into the leadership of the church.

Good God! They're babies. They're children having children. They're much too young to run something as complicated and delicate as this church. And then I remember that all my doctors are of that age range.

Now, whenever you discuss these concepts of the "mission", and "vision", and "strategy", every organization seems to define them differently. So, this is how we use those terms.

Our **mission** is what we do, our core purpose and activity. Our mission is summed up in our covenant: we bring people together for the worship of God and the service of all, honestly (in the love of truth) and humbly (in the spirit of Jesus). That's what we do. And ever since 1898, we have repeated those words in every service as a reaffirmation of our shared purpose.

And in 2000, we adopted a much longer statement of the principles and **values** that guide us in fulfilling our mission. And that statement is on the back of your order of service. The covenant is our mission statement, what we do, our purpose for existing. The values statement is the guiding principles by which we do our work.

The **vision** statement is a statement of what we think that we must do in the next 5 years.

Mission: Go to California.

Values: see the country as we go.

Vision: Drive to Buffalo by the end of the day.

The Strategic Planning Committee is suggesting for your consideration that our five year vision be engaging and empowering the next generation, the ones in late twenties to their early forties. It is what this Free Church needs to do now. Why? Because they are, right now, cultivating their own minds, releasing that world-changing energy that comes as people take possession of themselves.

Right now, the leadership of the church are people of the baby-boomer generation, like myself; I was born in 1949; and it is time for us to prepare to leave the stage for those who will follow us. It is time to bring fresh eyes to the old questions and new

energy to the work and new understandings of how people are answering the call of liberal religion.

“I call that church free that is a pilgrim church, a servant church, on an adventure of the spirit.”

The adventure awaits.

THE FREE COMMUNITY

Originally: I'll Call Our City Free

Sermon of February 21, 2010

All of this is about freedom.

Specifically, this church is about the innate and inherent power of every man and woman to know their own mind. This church exists so that they can reverently worship the source of the lives they live, in their own way, and with their own thoughts and understanding.

The People of this church gather together to worship and to serve, honestly (in the love of truth) and humbly (in the spirit of Jesus) while protecting each other's religious freedom and to encourage each other's growth.

We know that the process of claiming oneself is a lifelong process. It takes place not only at the level of conscious thought, the theories and theologies, the ideas and the ideologies, it is not just putting those to the test. It is also takes place on a social level, becoming conscious of the ways of your people, the discrimination and diminishment that you may have suffered, or the carefree sense of entitlement that you may have acquired so long ago.

Claiming yourself even includes all that work of self-understanding that you do down there, in the realms of the subconscious and unconscious, down there, where the wild things are, where you in your pajamas with nothing more than a paper crown must learn to live with those wild things and be their King.

I know what some of you are thinking; Tom, you make this too hard, all this struggle and sturm and drang, and all this heroic self-liberation.

"God is Grace", you say, "the Universe is your friend, you don't have to try so hard."

Tell me about it, I say. Tell me about it. If you have learned that, tell me about it, because I am anxious to know.

Because for me, there is nothing harder than to stay still for a moment, to let the sun fall upon my face, to let my body relax, and to say to myself, "You have a right to be here; you have a right to be happy, you have a right to think your own thoughts and say them aloud, to feel your own emotions." I don't think that I am alone when I say that owning those words are my toughest struggle.

Stop thinking of yourself as an indentured servant, that your life consists of working off a mysterious debt that you owe.

There is a lot of energy in this building, and that energy, that heat, comes from people hard at work. It comes from the friction of minds rubbing up against their limits. It comes from the interaction of people encouraging each other.

This church is a building, as in “the church has a steeple” and the church is the worship service, as in “My family is going to church this Sunday.” But it is also a congregation. We congregate, meaning that we gather in one place. When you think about that is a pretty old fashioned concept: that people are connected only when they are in the same physical space. We are more than a congregation; we are a social network.

We are a social network, a group of people who are united by a common commitment to the free mind, spread out through the community and parts of many other networks. We congregate for a short time on Sunday, but we are also distributed and sprinkled through the community: working at the hospitals, doctors and nurses, and nutritionists, working in the non-profit agencies and colleges and universities of Worcester, business owners, and factory workers, firefighters, and lawyers and software engineers, fitness instructors and tenured professors, home-schooling moms and neighbors. Just think of the number of people who are in your closest circle of friends and co-workers – the people you talk to all the time – in your work, in your neighborhood – the people of this church are in contact with thousands, no tens of thousands of people every week.

So what is the effect we have on our communities? I am not talking about whether they know we are Unitarian Universalists and whether we are talking up our way of religion. I am asking what is our influence among the people we know and work with. What example do we set? When the issues are difficult, when there is a moral element to the choice before you and your colleagues, what role do you play? Somebody somewhere in the Christian tradition said, “Preach the Gospel everyday; occasionally use words.”

If our friends, neighbors and co-workers had to figure out what “Liberal Religion” is all about, just by looking at us, what would they think it means?

What are the social and political signs of Liberal Religion in the community and in the country?

This is a tricky subject and one that has evolved over the years.

When this church was founded, back in 1785, Unitarians were a New England religion, for the most part, and politically, they were overwhelmingly Federalists. That meant that they were pro-Great Britain, pro-manufacturing and trade, and suspicious of Southern Jeffersonism.

The Federalist Party fell apart at the time of the War of 1812, after all they were pro-British, and England invaded the United States, and then the New England Yankee Protestants became Whigs until they all became Republicans at the time of the Civil War.

And Unitarians generally stayed Republican for over a hundred years, ending up as part of that New England Moderate branch of the Republican Party; always described as socially liberal and fiscally conservative. Pro-business. In 1969, a survey was taken on the political views of members of this church, and I have no idea how accurate that survey was, but it showed that 80% of the congregation identified themselves as Republican.

One of the historic alliances of the Northern New England Republicans was with the African American population in the South. The seeds of this alliance was sown by the Abolitionist movement, continued through the Civil War and Reconstruction and on through the rest of the 19th and early 20th Century.

When we get to the Civil Rights era, it was no surprise that Unitarians across the country and throughout New England became supporters of the movement in the South. It then developed that Unitarian Universalist churches across the country started to attract many people into their membership who saw them as places where they could connect to the all the social movements that were taking place in the country: the Civil Rights Movement, the women's movement, the anti-war movements, the gay and lesbian movements etc.

As a result, the Baby Boomer generation brought about a huge shift in the political and social stance of Unitarian Universalist churches across the country. In most of the United States, UU churches became almost entirely Democrats. Democrats became the right end of the political spectrum in many churches, with various radicals to their left. Here in the older churches of New England, the elder generation remained Republican and so the church was politically diverse.

One of the divisive issues in Unitarian Universalism has been the whole issue of how a UU church ought to relate to the political and social sphere. On the one side is the view of many churches, especially non-New England, newer churches that see the church as a rallying point for politically liberal causes. You could say that they envision "A Movement Church."

On the other side has been the more "traditionalist" wing that argues for what would be called "The politically diverse church" or "the politically neutral church", which meant that the church steered clear of topics and stands that would divide the church, or offend some of their members.

If you go to General Assembly and see a group of UU ministers of differing ages sitting around a table in the lobby lounge and you want some evening entertainment, throw the topic of how political the church should be in their discussion and sit back and watch. People will argue all night, because we have been arguing for years and will probably be still arguing in the nursing home years from now.

Where this goes in the future, I don't know. What I see is that younger UU's, who are not Baby Boomers and older, look at this issue with different eyes. By talking to people, I see that the younger UU's are not political liberals only, but that there is

also a significant number of people who see themselves as political libertarians as well.

I am happy to hand this issue off, unsolved, to the next generation of religious liberals, to give them the room to find the way forward for themselves. One of the ways that I am trying to free my own mind is to let go of some of the polarities that have defined my world for a long time.

But there is no way that a person's religious and spiritual understandings are not reflected in their views of social policy and politics. And there is no way that our church community will not come to stand for certain values. We will be known for something, and that something should flow from what we ask of ourselves and how we try to be with each other.

We make a call to conversion to the community at large, take possession of one's self, to free the mind, to become the subject of your life, and to see the image of God in everyone else, to welcome the truth from wherever it comes. What would our community look like; sound like, be like if it answered our call?

Our mission is summed up in our covenant, and I think that it boils down to five virtues: honesty, humility, unity, reverence and service. Honesty is the love of truth, and humility is the spirit of Jesus. We hunger for unity, to bring people together, to gather people, and we urge an attitude of reverence, reverence for life, for the environment that sustains, for the people who surround us, for the worship of God, that great good intention at the heart of creation and we understand that life is service, that seeing the needs of others, and doing what you can, is what brings joy and satisfaction to life.

I will call that city free where the relationships between people are honest and sincere, where vexatious issues of our common life are discussed candidly, where slanders and lies and demonization fall on deaf ears, where truth is recognized whencesoever it may come.

I will call that city free where the people all bow down in humble respect to the image of God visible in everyone, where all regard all with a generous sympathy, where snobbery, and prejudice, and chauvinism are no more.

I will call that city free where the city seeks to know itself as one community, where the spirit of unity brings delight to all differences, and where the degradation of one is known to diminish all.

I will call that city free which brings reverence to all that is ineffable and unknowable, from the currents of history upon which we ride, to the vast movements of nature, to the deepest mysteries of the human memory and heart, which sees as divine the unutterable yearnings of the bereaved, the inexpressible hopes of the parent, the unanswered longings of the lonely, and the inarticulate dreams of the child, all of love's manifold expressions of desire.

I will call that city free where everyone is handled with care, as we are all such fragile vessels of hope.

I will call that city free where service is a way life, where there is good work for every set of hands, where the opportunity to thrive and prosper is there for every person, where every human need is acknowledged, where healing is always a possibility and care is the currency we exchange.

I will call our city free when the Holy Spirit blows through the streets of the city and refreshes every tired heart.

The Free City, it is the vision implicit in our covenant, and in our mission and values statement as a church. It is what we, you and me, ought embody in our daily lives, with the people we know and who know us. It should be visible in the ways that we act as citizens and co-workers and neighbors. It is the way of life to which Liberal Religion calls us and our city.

May it be so.