

**Serenity Prayer: The Road to Freedom
Rally Sunday, September 14, 2014
First Church of East Hartford**

This morning the Israelites begin their Freedom Walk.
For the next four weeks we will be journeying with the Israelites
 on their way from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land,
 we will follow the narrative lectionary, reading and exploring the biblical book of Exodus
We start this morning with the Israelites stuck between Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea.
 they are furious at Moses for taking them out into the desert to drown.
 They can't believe that God will actually save them.
 And then the miracle happens,
 the Red Sea parts and they walk through on dry land.
 [researchers have explored the scientific plausibility of such an occurrence,
 but the point of this scripture is not a factual retelling,
 the point is a people retelling a spiritually incredible experience
 in which God makes a way out of no way and brings the people out of slavery.]
Before the miracle, the people were grumbling,
 afterwards, when they saw what God had done,
 as our scripture says, they "believed in The Lord"
The Israelites come to believe that God can truly bring them freedom.
We will explore how to be free this morning.

PRAYER: Serenity

What does it mean to be free?

- free to vote, speak your mind, participate [civic, social freedom]
- free from worry, fear, from anxiety
- freedom is peace, calm [spiritual, emotional freedom]

There are two roads to freedom:

1. Letting go and accepting the things we cannot change.
2. Courageously throwing off the burdens that bind us and changing what we can

There is a simple prayer that outlines the way to freedom.
It is the serenity prayer.

Sometimes freedom comes from being at peace with what is:

It is changing our mindset or perspective when the situation around us can't change.

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change.

When the Egyptian army is hot on our trail and there is a massive sea before us,
 God grant us the serenity to know you will make a way out of no way.

When there is a teacher or a boss or a coworker that rubs us the wrong way,
 God grant us serenity to let their words roll off our back.

When there is traffic on 84,

 God grant me the serenity to enjoy the music playing on the radio.

When we lose a loved one - through death or any other means,

God grant us peace in the midst of our grief.
When one of us struggle with the pulls of addiction,
God grant us the serenity to acknowledge there is an illness wreaking havoc on
our lives
When we struggle with the desire for more goods or a new google watch,
God grant us the serenity to accept the resources we have.

BUT, BUT,

the world is not as it should be.

Resources are not fairly distributed.
Journalists should not be beheaded.
Planes should not crash into buildings.
Women should not be murdered.
Children should not go hungry.
Men should not be degraded because of the color of their skin.
yes, a quick read of the news reveals that the kingdom of heaven is not fully realized.

AND SO,

freedom is not just accepting everything as is.
freedom also comes with change.
there are times when we need to have the courage to make changes.

Sometimes freedom comes from changing unjust systems,

I think of the many revolutions and civil rights movements in the world's history.
Freedom sometimes means literally throwing off the chains.

God grant me the courage to change the things I can.

When I see someone being mistreated,
God grant me the courage to speak up.
When a friend is hurting or grieving,
God grant me the courage to sit with them in their pain.
When a job is not working for me,
God grant me the courage to explore other options.
When people put me down for being unemployed,
God grant me the courage to believe in myself and apply myself one more time.
When I get in an argument with a loved one,
God grant me the courage to say sorry and
God grant me the courage to forgive.
When I've learned that my habits are harmful to another,
God grant me the courage to change my ways.
When I think I have all the answers,
God grant me the courage to ask questions and listen to others.

Now, the question is - when to accept and when to change?

For better or for worse, **God gives us the ability to choose.**

God granted us free will, the ability to make decisions.

At the beginning of time,

God divided the chaotic waters and lifted up land and placed humans upon that land
and gave us the choice.

God said: you can name creation, you can choose the food you eat, you can choose to listen to me or go your own way.

And in the course of history,

God divided the Red Sea waters and surrounded the scared Israelites with an angel and a cloud and gave them the choice.

God said: you can be free, you can choose to walk across this land and head to the promised Land, you can choose to listen to me or you can choose to go back to Egypt.

Throughout their time in the desert the Israelites wrestle with this question -

would we be better off going back to Egypt?

God commanded them to go, but God didn't physically pick them up and move them.

God gives us the freedom to choose,

but making the choice is not so easy,

and so we turn again to God, praying for wisdom.

God grant me the wisdom to know the difference between when to make changes and when to accept things for how they are.

God grant me the wisdom to know when to give someone another chance,
and when to accept that I need to let the relationship go.

God grant me the wisdom to know when to give advice
and when to be a sounding board.

God grant me the wisdom to know when to try something new
and when to revel in the time-honored tradition.

God grant me the wisdom to know when to go along with others
and when to speak out.

God grant me the wisdom to see what is holy and what belongs back in Egypt.

God grant me the wisdom.

this wisdom comes from God.

That means it does not come from any one individual.

You as an individual don't have all the answers, I don't have all the answers,

Uncle Joe doesn't have all the answers,

your bff across the street doesn't have all the answers.

Wisdom comes from listening widely and deeply for the whisper of the Holy Spirit weaving through us all.

Part of what we do as a congregation is to work together to discern the wisdom of God.

We are the First *Congregational* Church of East Hartford.

to be congregational means every person's voice is heard

that means that we decide as one body.

no one person makes all the decisions,

and no one person can veto a decision.

The serenity prayer brings us to freedom, and

As we begin our journey together as a pastor and a people,

I hope that the serenity prayer might be our guide in our ministry together.

May God grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change:

Grant us the serenity as a church to accept the changing urban landscape,

Grant us the serenity to accept our history - good and otherwise.

Grant us the serenity as a church to accept new ways of communication in our tech world

May God grant us the courage to change the things we can,

Grant us the courage as a church to change to meet the evolving needs of the people of East Hartford.

Grant us the courage as a church to welcome new people who may not share our point of view, or background, or culture.

Grant us the courage as a church to change how we share our story so that people can continue to hear the good, good story of God's love for the world.

May God grant us the wisdom to know the difference btwn when to change and when to accept things as they are.

May we listen to the ways the Holy Spirit is weaving through us
and through those around us.

Amen.