

# Covenant Group #5: Freedom

**Light Candle:** “May we be reminded here of our highest aspirations, and inspired to bring our gifts of love and service to the altar of humanity. May we know once again that we are not isolated human beings but connected, in mystery and miracle, to the universe, to this community and to each other.” - Anonymous

**Check In** “How goes it with your spirit?”

## Opening Reading

Story by Robert Fulghum, from *All I Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*:

Folks across the street are really with-it types. They jog and scarf bean sprouts and recycle everything but the air they breathe. Liberation is a big thing for them, too. Both men’s and women’s. They aren’t married – they have a ‘contract’ – and lead independent lives. Their consciousness is so raised they float. Nice folks. Give the neighborhood a progressive tone. Well, so.

They bought themselves an 18-speed mountain bicycle. Tandem. On the grounds of economy and efficiency. They’ve been riding it every day. In matching cycle suits and leather helmets, with jugs of go-juice and everything. He always rides in front, I notice. He always steers. Always. Not very libby, really.

Conversations with each of them separately reveal the age-old truth. Privately, he thinks he’s stronger and has a better sense of direction. She lets him. Because she gets to look around and enjoy the scenery; because she can stop pedaling and he doesn’t notice; and if they crash, he’s good padding.

The everlasting tandem. Men in front, women to the rear. It’s probably true that men are stronger. But women are smarter – at least

this one is. Liberation, I guess, is everybody getting what they think they want, without knowing the whole truth. Or in other words, liberation finally amounts to being free from things we don’t like in order to be enslaved by things we approve of. Here’s to eternal tandem.

## Reflection Questions:

- 1) What is the connection between fear and freedom? What are your fears? What unexpressed fears or anxieties motivated much of what you do? How do your fears keep you in bondage? What happens when you express your fears, become deeply acquainted with them?
- 2) The United States is talked about as the “land of the free, home of the brave.” This is part of our “freedom narrative.” But what is “real freedom” vs. “cheap freedom?” What are our assumptions about freedom in this culture – is it political freedom? Freedom to buy? Freedom to do whatever we want to do? In other words, what does freedom mean in the face of climate change, over-population, and over consumption?
- 3) What is our narrative and understanding of freedom for our (mostly) middle class adult life? How does family, job, mortgage, etc., fit into that sense of freedom? What are the images of freedom we know and love and how well do they hold up under close scrutiny? Patricia H. Davis in her article *Live Free and Die: The Moral Dilemma of American Beauty*, writes, “images of freedom that are presented to middle-class men and women are often extremely limited, laughable, or absolute frauds – credit cards and shopping sprees, cigarettes, red convertibles, new and improved golf clubs, home theaters, and retirement to sunny climates”

(53). How are we in bondage to our culture, a “culture is...materialistic, competitive, and aggressive...[in which] more people work longer hours in more isolating and alienating conditions and friendship has become a major casualty of our lifestyle?” (Rita M. Gross in *What Went Wrong? Feminism and Freedom From the Prison of Gender Roles.*)

- 4) What new narrative of freedom would you like to construct?
- 5) Does liberation, as Robert Fulghum writes, “finally amount to being free from things we don’t like in order to be enslaved by things we approve of?” What would you like to be freed from? Enslaved by?
- 6) What sort of freedom can be found in silence? How much silence can you endure? What sort of personal awakening and transformation emerge from meditative silences?

**Check Out:** Share a word or sentence about what you are leaving with...or share a word of appreciation with someone who said something that you found meaningful.

## **Business**

### **Closing Reading:**

*Blessing* by Rev. Barbara Pescan

We spend so much time running from  
ourselves  
Fleeing from what we know  
About the goodness in our hearts  
We think we can escape  
The intelligence of our loving.

Imagine

You are standing before a bodhisattva –  
Jesus, Buddha, the first mother  
It does not matter what you call the holy one  
–  
He has dust on his shoes

Chaff clings to her  
The smells of being alive –  
Shining from their faces is the beam of all  
their questions  
The compassion of their living

Can you see yourself through their eyes?  
Can we know each other like this?  
(We, who no longer believe in messiahs  
Can hardly believe in each other.)

Can we know ourselves seen  
And know each other this same way  
Until our restless hearts  
Learn to abide  
In this knowing and this love?  
Can we live in the gaze of blessing?