

Press Ye Ever Forward
Rev. Nicole Farley
First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
September 2, 2012

Psalm 15

¹ O LORD, who may abide in your tent?
Who may dwell on your holy hill?
² Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right,
and speak the truth from their heart;
³ who do not slander with their tongue,
and do no evil to their friends,
nor take up a reproach against their neighbors;
⁴ in whose eyes the wicked are despised,
but who honor those who fear the LORD;
who stand by their oath even to their hurt;
⁵ who do not lend money at interest,
and do not take a bribe against the innocent.
Those who do these things shall never be moved.

James 1:17-27

¹⁷Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

¹⁹You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. ²¹Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.

²²But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. ²³For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; ²⁴for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. ²⁵But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.

²⁶If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. ²⁷Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

To bring our visitors up to speed, this summer I have been preaching on the history of a variety of hymns we sing. Today is the last in the series, which concludes with First Church's centennial hymn, *Press Ye Ever Forward*, written by member Ruth Williams Freehoff for the one-hundredth anniversary celebrated sixty-six years ago. For those of you who were here, you were younger than I am now so I offer a refresher via [The Freeman](#).

The pastor, the Rev. Hugh M. Reiner, announces that services begin at 10:45 a.m. with a choir processional, "All Hail the Power of Jesus Name." Twenty-four elders will follow in the processional and take their seats at the front of the sanctuary. They are D. N. McDowell, James McCombe, Walter S. Dana, James Rodgers, E. Robert Kimball, Fred Winchell, P. A. Smith, J. L.

Martin, Ed. James, Carl Taylor, Wilson Wright, Roy J. Lyon, E. C. DeRemer, Dr. Gwilym Davies, Elmer H. Ladwig, Dr. Tom Stime, D. N. Hughes, George W. Clayton, Evan Davies, R. H. Schuett, L. D. Morris, George Werning, Jr., Earle Olson, Roy McDowell. Twelve will distribute the Bread and twelve the Cup in the service. Honorary elders are Henry E. Blair, J. T. Boyd, O. R. Evans, George Eble, C. L. Garlock, H. T. Smith, and V. P. Batha,

The congregation will be introduced to and will share in the centennial hymn entitled “Press Ye Ever Forward” by Ruth Williams Freehoff. This title is taken from the centennial motto submitted by Mrs. W. A. Ganfield, “Press forward into a new century.”¹

I suspect there are familiar names in that list beyond the Reverend Reiner, the wife of William Arthur Ganfield, former president and professor of Carroll College, and the wife of Senator William Freehoff. Today our focus is on the latter. From my research, I could tell you she was born in Genesee in 1893; I could tell you how she voted, the clubs and orders with which she was affiliated, where she taught piano and voice in 1970, or even how much she weighed in 1951 - they printed the strangest things in professional music biographies back then. But those are not the important things I learned about Ruth Williams Freehoff. The important things are these: she was passionate about her Welsh heritage, she was passionate about music, and she was passionate about her faith in God.

The last I could have suspected by the lyrics of today’s hymn but I found verification in a most unexpected place. On December 5, 1952, a letter to The Freeman from Ruth Williams Freehoff was printed. What follows are excerpts:

Six juvenile crimes were listed on the front page of Saturday evening’s paper. How can I, as a home builder, a worker in my church and community, help build a Christian society where my child’s faith in God is secure, where God’s love prevails in human hearts and where peace will be foremost in the middle of men?

If the purpose of my life is:

1. To bring up my child in the future and admonition of the Lord.
2. To serve the Lord with gladness and my country with devotion.
3. To study, to show myself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed.
4. To walk uprightly with my God.
5. To give unstintingly of my time, my talents.
6. To know the truth so that the truth shall keep me free.
7. To love my neighbor as myself.
8. To help the needy, the unfortunate, the handicapped, the delinquent and the stranger that is within my gate.
9. To keep abreast with the times so that I may wisely guide youth into a clearer understanding of the future, its joys, its sorrows, its privileges, and its responsibilities.

Then by precept and example I have carried out Christ’s command: “Do unto others as you would that they do unto you.”

Since all we can take with us to the “great beyond” is the character which we build while here on

¹ Waukesha Daily Freeman: September 7, 1946.

earth, we must start early to put in the ingredients that, when mixed with joys and sorrows, trials and errors, love and hatreds, compassion and conflicts, successes and failures, will produce a life dedicated to the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God.

What are the ingredients that are necessary?

1. Simple, child-like faith.
2. Singleness of purpose.
3. Simplicity and sincerity in all things.
4. Slowness in anger.
5. Straightforwardness in our dealings.
6. Steadfastness in our daily living.
7. Security in our Christian homes.
8. Service through Christian friendship.
9. Surrender of self in the service of God.

Let us work, let us pray and let us say with St. Paul - "For one to live is Christ, to die is gain."

When the front page of all papers will carry stories of joy not sorrow, love not hatred, compassion not conflict, success not failures.

The answer lies with us, will we accept the challenge?²

Her letter to the editor is as eloquent and faith-filled as any well-crafted, well-spoken sermon, even concluding with a charge to the hearer. "The answer lies with us, will we accept the challenge?" Her letter was not an urging to mothers and fathers but to the whole citizenry. She herself was not a mother but did not claim that as an excuse to leave the guiding of youth to others. No, indeed, she lists as a purpose of her life, and so also the readers' and ours, "To keep abreast with the times so that I may wisely guide youth into a clearer understanding of the future, its joys, its sorrows, its privileges, and its responsibilities."

The same vows we pledge at any baptism are in response to this question: Do you, as members of the church of Jesus Christ, promise to guide and nurture these children of God by word and deed, with love and prayer, encouraging them to know and follow Christ and to be faithful members of his church? If we pick and choose who we guide and nurture, as we are all children of God, then, as we read in James, we deceive our hearts. James' charge is this: "Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves." As admonition, we read, "If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless." This may sound like a condemnation of faith traditions which seem to behave hypocritically but a peek into the Greek makes the true intent clear. θρησκεία [thres-ke-IA] can mean "religion" but it can also mean "worship" so hear again this admonition. "If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts,

² Waukesha Daily Freeman, December 5, 1952.

their worship is worthless” or in vain.

Enter the second verse of our hymn. “Press ye ever forward, / Heed Christ’s clarion call, / Serve the Lord with gladness, / Suffer none to fall; / Comfort ye my people, / Honor God and man, / Keep the Sabbath holy, / Share with God His plan.” If we claim to do all but even one of these commands, our worship may not be worthless but it *is* worth less, worth less than what God deserves in grateful thanks. The psalmist writes, “Who may dwell on your holy hill? Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart; who do not slander with their tongue, and do no evil to their friends, nor take up a reproach against their neighbors; in whose eyes the wicked are despised, but who honor those who fear the Lord; who stand by their oath even to their hurt.” If we may not yet dwell on God’s holy hill, do we give up?

Of course we do not, for we have hope. Verses three and four: “Press ye ever forward, / Christ is on your side, / He will grant you wisdom / In whate’er betide; / Follow in His precepts, / Shed His light abroad, / Make the church a temple / For the living God. // Press ye ever forward, / Forward through the years, / With Christ’s firm conviction / Faith will conquer fears; / Peace will reign triumphant, / Love will vanquish hate, / Man with man be brother, / Christ’s life radiate.” We return to James, who puts it this way: “Religion [or worship] that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

As this church pressed into a new century of serving God, the hymn accompanied the Bible in offering reminders of what service to the living God should be. Shed His light abroad, make the church a temple for the living God, care for orphans and widows in their distress, keep oneself unstained. Ruth Williams Freehoff offered these additional reminders in a letter to the editor in 1952:

To bring up my child in the future and admonition of the Lord.
To serve the Lord with gladness and my country with devotion.
To study, to show myself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed.
To walk uprightly with my God.
To give unstintingly of my time, my talents.
To know the truth so that the truth shall keep me free.
To love my neighbor as myself.
To help the needy, the unfortunate, the handicapped, the delinquent and the stranger that is within my gate.

To keep abreast with the times so that I may wisely guide youth into a clearer understanding of the future, its joys, its sorrows, its privileges, and its responsibilities.

Sixty-six years into this new century, reminders cannot hurt. There is still work to be done in this world so “Press ye ever forward, / ‘Gainst the foes of God, / Build a sure foundation, / Where men’s feet have trod; / Live His love and mercy, / Peace, goodwill to men, / Till the earth reecho / His own grand Amen. // Press ye ever forward, / Loyal stewards be / Pressing forward / In this new century.” You’ve likely heard the saying, “Today is the first day of the rest of your life.” Today may not be the beginning of a

new century for either of our churches, or an anniversary of any sort, but each day is a new beginning of the rest of the Church's life, the big C church, the church universal. What we do as people of faith matters. What people think about the Church, what people think about Jesus, what people think about God relies on us. You have the reminders of what to do. And, if we forget them, we know where to look. "The answer lies with us, will we accept the challenge?"

Let us pray: Lord, we seek to dwell with you on your holy hill. Grant us wisdom in whate'er betide and courage to continue when we fall short until that day when we return to you. Amen.