

Called to Freedom
Matthew 11:28-30
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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There are natural stages in our lives when we fight for our independence. If you have ever been a child or raised a child, you can probably name a few of these.

There is that early stage in toddlerhood when children, both appropriately and frustratingly for their caregivers, are learning to do things and want to do them on their own.

During that stage many of us who are the accompanying adults can only see how much more time it takes or how the little one is doing it wrong. Shoes go on opposite feet. Jackets are sometimes inside out or upside down. The time we knew we had to leave the house has passed and our little one is still trying to accomplish their independent task. Fortunately or unfortunately they have yet to learn about the burden of independence.

And while there are little acts of independence sprinkled throughout our growing up years, perhaps the next stage that we really pay a lot of attention to...or maybe just the one that I am really aware of because of the age of my own children...is the independence of teenagers who are growing into adults.

We may particularly notice this stage as we who are parents lose access to medical records while still getting to pay the bills...or as teenagers, especially those 18 and 19-year-olds who are technically adults, challenge our decisions and remind us that they don't have to do what we say. Really, as a parent I realized many years before my children turned 18 that they could make choices I wasn't in agreement with and often there wasn't anything I could do about it. While I could carry a crying three-year-old to the car, I haven't yet met a 13-year-old with whom that is an option.

And, although parents are typically loath to admit it, the reality is that all of these stages are both developmentally appropriate *and* they are important. In fact, if we are doing it right, our children *will* be seeking independence, but not *only* independence. If we are doing it right, they will know that they have people who love them and offer support even as they exercise those muscles.

And that is really the key.

Too often, and this is especially true in our nation, too often we act as if independence means we have no connection or responsibility to anyone else. We, and we could spend lots of time in conversation about the founding of our country, and the type of people who were drawn to come here, and the ways that we approached expansion and so many other things, but too often we have lived by mottos like, "Pull yourself up with

your own bootstraps” and “I am a self-made man.” Too often we have acted as if we were truly independent of any other influences or connections. And sometimes, we even think that we want it that way.

But freedom, at its best, isn’t about being able to do “anything I darn well please.” It is not about a lack of connection or accountability. Rather, freedom at its best is practiced not independent of, but in concert with those very things, *with* connection and accountability.

Cameron Trimble recently told of “a story in the Buddhist tradition about a vast net suspended across the universe

“Indra, the king of the gods, owns the net. At each crossing point, a jewel hangs. These jewels stretch endlessly in all directions. Each jewel is so well polished that it reflects all the others. If you look closely at one jewel, you see every other jewel reflected. If you look into one of those reflections, you find all the other jewels again.

Trimble writes, “Most of us have been taught to see the world very differently. We often think of ourselves as separate people living separate lives. Countries compete with other countries. Religions and companies do the same. We are taught to look out for ourselves, protect our interests, and make sure our own future is safe.

“Indra’s Net shows us that this way of seeing things limits our vision. Nothing stands alone. Everything is connected. The forest affects the city, the river affects the farm. Refugees and politicians, billionaires and children, the living and those yet to be born, all are linked. Every jewel reflects every other jewel (Cameron Trimble, “Indra’s Net” a meditation at *Piloting Faith*, June 22, 2026).

This is not just a Buddhist concept, but this is at the heart of the freedom we are invited into as Christians.

See, while too often we talk about freedom as making us separate or independent, the freedom we find in Jesus is actually about connection not individualism. While too often we feel like we are running from expectation to expectation, trying to please everyone, the freedom Jesus offers us is the freedom of rooting ourselves in trusting relationships.

These verses Mark read for us today come in a context. Jesus has empowered his disciples and given them instructions for going and doing his work. And now, in chapter 11, there has been conversation about John the Baptist and about Jesus. But here we see that some of the leaders are criticizing both of them, and trying to pit them and their followers against each other.

John the Baptist, he was too strict, living with too little, resisting partaking of food and drink those around him deemed normal. But meanwhile, there was Jesus. And Jesus, well, he was doing too much, enjoying food and drink and the company of everyone and

anyone. It seemed that no matter what choice was made, someone was going to criticize it. The burden of doing things a certain way, was wearing people down.

Pastor Alan Brehm writes, “in response, Jesus announced that he had come to set people free from their burdens. He came to free the people who, no matter how hard they tried, could never live up to the rigid requirements of the religious perfectionists. The rule-makers went around declaring everybody but themselves impure and unclean for some reason or another. But what gets hidden in all of this is that those who make themselves the arbiters of holiness carry an incredible burden themselves. Beneath the façade of “holier than thou” lurks the nagging doubt as to whether they have carried out the rules perfectly” (Brehm, “Lay Down Your Burden” at [The Waking Dreamer](#), July 20, 2011).

And while it might not be religious rules that are bearing down on you, the reality is that each of us has some burden that weighs heavily. Burdens of fear, of perfectionism, of not being enough...burdens of anger and separation, of worrying that we are weak, of seeking independence to the detriment of ourselves and our community.

But into whatever burdens us...into all the things we tell ourselves we should be doing...into all the ways we think we have to be independent and take care of ourselves...Jesus comes and reminds us that we don't have to do this alone. In fact, we are not designed to do it alone. Jesus, too, says that we are connected and are meant to live that way. Whatever the burden, we aren't forced to handle it on our own. In fact, there is freedom in community.

And so we hear him say, “Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30, NRSVUE).

See, true freedom, it isn't about being independent in a disconnected or self-reliant sense. Rather, true freedom is about living life in relationships, sharing both the joys and the struggles of being human. True freedom comes when we know that we are all connected, that who I am reflects who you are. True freedom comes when we move toward each other rather than apart, and in doing so offer each other companionship and rest. May it be so.

