

Matthew 11:16-30

“But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places and calling to their playmates, ‘We piped to you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; the Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.” Then he began to upbraid the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. I tell you that it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.”

At that time Jesus declared, “I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will. All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

How many celebrated the 4th this past Thursday? Not many with all the rain we had. Do you really believe yourself to be free? Jesus challenges us, this Independence Day weekend, to think about how free we actually are. Despite the freedoms that we celebrate, Jesus reminds us that we are very often bound by our own personal commitments and/or our complacency which keeps us from responding to Him.

Jesus has a question for us this morning. Jesus has stepped into our busy weekend to ask us, “Are you really free?” Here we are celebrating our country’s freedom, or independence, which was fought for and claimed more than two centuries ago. During this time we use words like “freedom” and “liberty,” along with hanging and waving many red, white and blue flags all over the place. There were parades, festivals, barbeques, and let’s not forget the fireworks, if it hadn’t rained, and what about all those big sales in most of the retail outlets. And with all this going on in our lives right now Jesus asks us “Are you really free?”

Jesus never really asks this question in so many words, but it's the same question which is incorporated throughout this chapter where He has been constantly surprised by all the people's lack of freedom to respond to who He is and all His teachings. Earlier in Matthew chapter 11, Jesus saw that even, His own cousin John the Baptist, was a little confused about whether Jesus is really "*the one*."

Jesus complained of those who looked at Him and thought this guy spends too much time "*eating and drinking*," partying so to speak, and apparently they couldn't take Him seriously. He even rebuked the people of the city in which He had settled, which is Capernaum, for its lack of response to the works He has already done there. Jesus asks us this morning, "Are you any different? Jesus asks us, are you really free to respond to what I am offering this morning?"

Are we really free to respond to Jesus? That's an interesting way to inquire about our freedom. When we talk about freedom, we tend to think of the hard won freedoms which we cherish, and often take for granted under our Constitution. We stand on those freedoms; freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom to assemble; freedom of the press, freedom from

unreasonable search and seizure and from cruel and unusual punishment. All of these so called freedoms, and more, have been put to the test over and over during our nation's history, but Jesus seems to be talking about something else when He turns to us and asks, "Are you really free?"

We need to understand we aren't really as free as we believe. Most of the time we are just too busy to be free. Our calendars are so full of activities and appointments and "to do" lists, which makes it so we cannot find an open slot to be free. Our lives have become too busy to be free to worship and/or serve our Savior. Something has to go and usually it's Jesus who gets kicked to the curb.

Jesus experienced this same rejection in His time as well. "I'll follow you Jesus; I'm almost ready," one guy said, "Except give me a few days while I bury my father." Jesus asks us to follow Him and we reply "I'll follow you Lord ... Except ... I'm redoing my kitchen," or "I'll follow you Lord ... Except ... I HAVE to go to this event or that event," or "I'll follow you Lord ... Except ... I HAVE to stay home and cook for the family because they have to have it ready and on the table when they get here."

With all this flurry of activity, there is little, if any freedom for us to respond to God. We have chained ourselves to our personal calendars.

We aren't really free to respond to Jesus' request of "*Follow Me*," when we're held in the grip of our addictions, whether it's addictions to substances, or work, or sports, or shopping, or family. Our addictive behaviors blur our focus, sap our energies and/or redirect energies that could have opened us toward Christ. Actually we aren't really free to respond to Jesus' request of "*Follow Me*."

Other conditions interfere with our freedom in less tangible ways. Our ever collapsing financial safety nets and the increased burden of taxes and health-care costs have us working harder and longer for smaller rewards. The increasing push of our government on society imposes burdens not just on the poor, but also on the wealthy. We might well respond to Jesus' question with: "We're doing the best we can to free ourselves up to serve you but, it's just too hard!"

Jesus would likely respond in only a way He could, "Exactly! You've hit the nail on the head." If we pressed Jesus to explain this further, He might say, "You're trusting in your own wisdom and your own intelligence to free

yourself. What kind of foolishness is this? I am your freedom!” But are we really free to completely trust in Jesus?

Long ago, a Hebrew farmer was working so hard on Friday afternoon that he did not notice that the sun was setting and the Sabbath was beginning. When at last he looked up from his work, he realized that he could not make it home in time for Sabbath. Nor could he continue to walk to his house after the Sabbath had begun because the trip would require more steps than were allowed for observant Jews. So he made the decision to spend the Sabbath in his field. What worried him the most was not his lack of food or shelter, but the lack of proper prayers. See he was an uneducated man who trusted in the rabbi to lead him in the prayers; prayers that he somehow could not remember unless he was with the congregation in the synagogue.

After the Sabbath when he returned home, he ran into his rabbi. The rabbi said that he had missed the farmer at Sabbath service and the farmer apologized and told him what had happened. “I hope you were able to say the prayers anyway?” The rabbi continued, “I hope you were able to bless God our Maker and praise God’s work, the proper occupation for the Sabbath. Next time you should be more careful.” Instead he farmer said, “I

couldn't remember the words and the order in which to say them. So I recited the alphabet over and over and trusted God to shape the letters into prayers and praise."

Many of us here this morning are just like this farmer. We come here claiming to worship, providing we are not replacing worship with something else we believe will bring us peace. When many are asked to pray, they always cry out "I don't know what to say." Just like this farmer our relationship with Jesus is not really a close relationship. It's more like an acquaintance, someone we have heard about but don't really know personally. If we do not have a close personal relationship with Jesus we cannot expect to know Him and if we don't know Him we can't know the Father. This makes us like those we heard about in this morning's Scripture.

"It is like children sitting in the market places and calling to their playmates, 'we piped to you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.'" We hear the music, but do not dance. We hear the crying, but we do not weep ourselves. It's as if we are standing off on the side. We have become mere spectators. A spectator is someone who does absolutely nothing. All a spectator does is stay on the side and watch. A spectator has

nothing to do with the outcome. A spectator never makes any mistakes because they never take part. A spectator may celebrate, but they will always be celebrating what others have done, never can a spectator celebrate anything they did. Contrary to what you hear about home field advantage, the field is the same size as all the others and the spectators never set foot on the field. They do nothing, nothing but sit, or stand and watch!

Are you free? Are you really free to respond to Jesus' request of "*Follow Me?*" Jesus is calling all of us to "Follow Him." Can we follow Him, or are we so addicted to the world around us that we only stand at a distance and watch like a spectator?

"No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." This means only those who have a close personal relationship with Jesus can know God personally. This is completely different from knowing about God, or knowing about anything God has done. To really know God, to have felt His hand in your hand takes a close personal relationship. This cannot be accomplished watching from the side lines or from the back. It takes getting

so close to the Throne of Grace. Getting so close you can feel the heat from the altar fire. Are you free enough in your life to feel this heat?

But preacher I do so much right know; my life is so full I can't do anything else. But preacher I am so tired of all this rushing here and there, it feels like I do everything now. What does Jesus say about people who cry out like this? Jesus says "*Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*" Do you hear that? Jesus is calling every one of us to come to Him. He is not calling us to just sit or stand around on the sidelines and just cheer on all those who answer this call. Jesus is not calling us to do a little here and a little there, and to do it just for a little while. Jesus wants us for the long haul; He wants us through thick and thin. But to go the distance you need a close personal relationship, not just being an acquaintance.

We give our undivided attention to what-ever it is we value. All of us are willing to make sacrifices for what-ever it is we deem valuable. Jesus made a sacrifice for what He deemed valuable. That was you, are you willing to do the same? Is your relationship close enough with Jesus that you

can do as Jesus said in Luke 10:27, “*You shall love the Lord your God with **all** your heart, and with **all** your soul, and with **all** your strength, and with **all** your mind.*” Do you love Him that much? Do you? It’s a choice we all have to make. It’s a choice you have to make; no one can make this choice for you. Only you can make it and the time to choose is now! So, how free are you?