

John 17:1-11

One of my favorite commercials of late is a commercial from Chase Credit Cards. What I remember most about the commercial is that it has a rather catchy tune that goes like this.

“I’m free to do what I want any olllld time. I’m free to do what I want any old time.” Does anyone recognize that commercial? Anyway what I think the commercial is trying to convey is that if you have a Chase Credit card ----- you have the purchasing power, the purchasing power to buy or do whatever you would like.

Of course, that is only as far as your credit limit will allow you. Somehow, that isn’t mentioned in the TV commercial.

You’re free to do what you want, at least if you have a Chase Credit Card.

Actually, I really abhor the commercial. Chrishelle laughs every time this commercial comes on the television because she knows how much it gets under my skin. A few times, she’s looked at me and said, “Sean, don’t even get started.”

And it all goes back to that catchy tune that I will probably now have in my head all afternoon. “I’m free to do what I want...”

Just a disclaimer this sermon was not underwritten by Chase Credit Cards.

I struggle with that message, “I’m free to do what I want any old time.” I struggle with the individualism that that message perpetuates. The commercial for Chase Credits cards reinforces the notion that as an individual, I have certain rights, I have the freedom to do whatever I would like, whenever I want to.

And that would work well if we lived on this planet all by myself. However, we do not. Somehow the notion of individualism though still seeps into our very being and at times we act regardless of our responsibility to the other, we act without thinking about the impact that our actions have upon others, often we don’t think about how our decisions will shape or affect the earth, the environment, or even the community we live in.

However isn't individualism and the freedoms that it allows, such a part of being an American, isn't it such a part of how our nation came to be?

Thomas Jefferson wrote about some of those individual unalienable rights Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. They would become the basis of our Declaration of Independence from England. Don't we have the God given rights to pursue life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness?

Or is individualism at its core antithetical to the very heart of the Gospel?

Is not the heart of Christianity about placing the needs of others, placing the needs of the community before our very own needs?

"Go and sell all that you have and give it to the poor." "The first shall be last and the last shall be first." And of course, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Doesn't individualism pose a threat to authentic Christian community? In some way, doesn't individualism erode or weaken the community, particularly when individuals place their needs ahead of the needs of the community?

Our gospel today ends with Jesus commending the care of his disciples and ultimately commending the care of the community that grew up around him into the hands of the Father.

He specifically asks that the Father to protect the community, so that the community may be one as He and the Father are one. He says, "Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one as we are one."

He is asking for the father's protection from the very things that threaten to erode the integrity of the community.

Jesus realizes that if this community is going to continue to thrive the community is going to have to stand together against the forces that threaten to destroy it. The community

is going to have to be united as He and the Father are united. Otherwise, this fledgling community is not going to make out of the backwaters of Jerusalem.

And what ultimately developed in early Christianity were communities that stuck together in the midst of terrible persecution. Before Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire, Christianity was literally forced underground, early Christians worshiped in dark catacombs and tombs. Members used secret symbols and signs to help identify who was part of the community.

Early Christians were martyred and persecuted, they were outcast, thrown in prison and ultimately unable to participate in society. Even through incredible difficulties and hardships, Christian communities developed where members were cared for and protected.

Members were always expected to participate in the life of the community, to give back a little of what they had so that the community could thrive.

Were the disciples and the early Christian communities free to do what they wanted-absolutely? Are we free to do what we want- absolutely. After all, we do have rights.

Unfortunately, though Christianity will not work if we decide to go it alone, if we decide that we don't need the community AND that community doesn't need us. The community needs each and every one of us give a little bit of ourselves. To share our time, our talents and treasures and our experiences.

I would like to end with a short story about how I saw this community sharing itself with one of its members.

A few Sundays ago, between services, I had a short conversation with one of you. It was apparent that this person had had an incredibly hellacious week. A number of things had gone wrong, business wasn't going well and on top of that, the person had something terrible happen to her in her personal life. By Sunday this person was worn out, she was beat up and the best she could do was drag herself to church. The person didn't have much to offer other than

her presence in worship and the opportunity to commend her difficulties to God.

However, we as the worshipping community was able to offer her our presence, and in pastoral care showing up and being present is the most important thing we can offer to someone in midst of a tragedy or crisis. Did you ever think just showing up mattered? The community needs you and you need the community.

Are you free to do whatever you want any old time? Not if you want to be a part of an authentic Christian community.

AMEN