

We were on vacation this week, and had a very nice time. Met lots of wonderful people. It was our first vacation without both boys. Spencer has a summer job, so stayed home to work. The end of an era. Then on Saturday, yesterday, he turned 18, and we took he and his girlfriend to dinner. He acted very grown up. I remember when I turned 18, I told my parents I was old enough to make my own decisions and take care of myself, that I was now an adult. They just smiled, and began charging me rent. Ah, independence...

Do you remember being 18 and longing for independence, for the freedom to make your own decisions? I remember when I was two weeks out of high school, and received my first significant paycheck, \$272.50. I wanted to drive up to Lake Michigan and revisit the area I had spent my 16th summer. So I drove up there, stopping for the night in Michigan City, where I visited a carnival and got involved in a game of chance behind a tent where I lost \$272.50. Then, driving home, I was so distracted by my misfortune, I rear-ended a brand-new Corvette. Just tapped it. The dent wasn't very big, maybe only a foot long, with a few scratches you couldn't even notice if it was whizzing past you at 70 M.P.H, which I pointed out to the man, though he didn't seem consoled by that. Ah, independence...

Our longing for independence, for autonomy and freedom, is as old as Adam and Eve. They turned 18, and visited a carnival where they went behind a tent and walked past a man who was rather long and scaly, who asked them, “Don’t you want to be like God?” And because Adam and Eve were 18 and poor theologians, they said, “Sure.” And he took them for everything, their house and their garden and the leaves off their backs.

Independence is a tantalizing gift, but it comes wrapped in paper that can inflict a thousand cuts.

This week I’ve been thinking about the difference between independence and interdependence. Independence says, “I am free to do whatever I wish.” That is important and a necessary step in our human growth, to have the power to freely decide our destiny and our life’s course. No one should be able to choose that for us. When my grandfather was 14, his father decided he should quit school and work in the glass factory, which my grandfather did for 48 years, hating every moment of it. We all need the independence to determine our life’s course, to make our lives our own. When that doesn’t happen, it is dispiriting. In that sense, Adam and Eve’s quest for independence wasn’t sinful, but necessary for their growth. Of course, their decision came with consequences, but that is true of all our choices.

But then what happens after we have independence? Don't we begin to yearn for interdependence, when we can depend on others and they can depend on us. I have a relative who got married and it didn't work out because while he knew how to be independent, he knew how to be free, he was unable to be interdependent. He couldn't be depended upon and he didn't want to depend upon anyone else.

Legally, we say people are adults when they turn 18. But I think someone is an adult when they stop asking, *Am I free?* and start asking *Can I be depended upon?* Adulthood and maturity are not about age. They are about our willingness to be depended upon. For some people that happens when they're 12 years old. Some people can be 60 and not get it.

This past week we were at Bay View in Michigan, which is a United Methodist Chautauqua, founded in 1875. They have daily lectures on science, culture, ethics and religion. At night they have musical programs, which is why I was there. They had invited me to sing. No, I was giving daily lectures on progressive Christianity, and I met this man named Toby Jones, who was just a really neat guy. Very caring, very bright man, who also writes. He's just written a book called *The Way of Jesus*, in which he tells the story of a church in New York City called The Church of the Holy Apostles.

The church had once been a big, dynamic, powerful church, then it fell on hard times, people moved away, they were running out of money, and it was down to a handful of folks. So the bishop sends this new minister there with instructions to close the church down. This minister is fresh out of seminary, has never pastored before, but says to the people in the church, “Hey, if we’re going to close down, we might as well go out doing something Christlike.” So they decided to start feeding poor people. They put signs up, and the first day they feed 35 people in their basement. Then their roof started leaking and they had a fire, so the insurance company came in and restored their sanctuary, made it into beautiful, stunning space. They had to take out the pews while it was being worked on, then when they finished fixing it up, they said, “Why are we feeding all these people in a dingy, musty old basement? That’s so degrading. Let’s feed them upstairs where it’s beautiful.” So instead of moving the pews back in, which would only be used an hour a week, they moved in tables and chairs. Now they raise 2.7 million dollars a year to feed 1,200 people each day in the most beautiful place in their church. And on Sunday morning, the place is packed.

A reporter shows up and he’s talking to one of the old-timers in the church and he asks him, “Why did you do this?” And the guy says, “Because Jesus said to feed the hungry.”

And that's the difference between independence and interdependence.

Independence says, "I'm now free to do what I want."

Interdependence says, "People are counting on me. What can I do to help?"

