

Year A, Proper 9 2026
Saint Barnabas Church, Falmouth MA
The Rev. David Rider
July 5, 2026

Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30

Amid the military battles of WWII and its immediate aftermath, a British military psychiatrist was tasked with treating shell-shocked and otherwise traumatized soldiers who were brought to his hospital

Perhaps by the bad luck of his own age, he also had served earlier in life as a tank commander amid the carnage of WWI, so he had seen it all, so to speak

As a conscientious clinician overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of his caseload, Wilfred Bion moved from 1:1 counseling to assembling perhaps a dozen patients together for group treatment, where he unwittingly gained new insights about the human condition and the way we interact with each other

A hopeful psychoanalytic pioneer and physician who grew up amid Anglicanism in England, Wilfred Bion emerged as the pioneer of what would become group psychotherapy

Not only in clinical groups but in every human gathering and work group, Bion argued, we play out certain leadership roles and confront our ambivalences about dependency

Bion and his followers coined the great phrases of 'intra-dependency' and 'extra-dependency' which can be looped right back to Jesus's invitation in today's Gospel passage: "Come to me, all you that are weary and 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.”

Bion coined these clinical words that I ponder almost daily when thinking about nearly any social interaction including the way that we live in parish community

Intra-dependency represents the way we turn inward for strength and self-assertion: we suck it up, so to speak, and we tap inner resources to navigate life’s challenges and relationships

With extra-dependency, on the other hand, we get by with a little help from our friends

We recognize that we can’t go it alone, both in human community and with God

As good Anglicans, we might think about a harmonious balance in life between intra-dependency and extra-dependency, even as we recognize that we swing between extremes and unhealthy dimensions of each in ways that cause pain to ourselves and others

Although our family lives and our love lives are obvious contexts for navigating these dynamics, they also are at work in palpable ways both in our geo-political struggles and—I hope more positively—in our life as a parish family

Although this is not the place for extended analysis, think for a moment how these forces of intra-dependence and extra-dependence are playing out with our president and warfare in the Middle East

Of course, all international diplomacy presumes a balance of getting along and sticking to our guns, yet we still play out a psychological response from the first major terrorist assault on our soil

We continue our struggle with whether we go it alone and risk of isolationism to prevent another terrorist's body-blow, or rely on international alliances to confront a deeply troubled world

Closer to home, our spiritual and other dependency needs play themselves out in the culture of our parish life, right here at Saint Barnabas

Every parish—consciously or unconsciously—seeks the 'sweet spot' of community life, in which we share our faith and support each other amid the exigencies of life

In our worship, program and fellowship, we rarely put it to a vote or formally decide whether to be warm and cuddly or cold and aloof, but somehow it always gets played out

Perhaps the clergy and certain parish leaders unwittingly set the 'temperature' of the place, so we have come to call this spiritual intimacy—the way we come to know and care for each other as brothers and sisters in Christ

In the context of today's Gospel passage, I'll make a pitch for navigating the healthy ways in which our pastoral care manages our common need for intra- and extra-dependency

Jesus invites us to hand over the heavy burdens of life and trust in his gentle and humble heart that provides rest for your souls

In addition to our family and friends, we trust that a divine and benevolent power—God—has our back and gives us lift on our heaviest days

Whether it's the still-small voice in the night or the protective armor of the holy one, we navigate both our most satisfying and most challenging days with prayer and confidence in God's presence

At the same time, we trust in a God who beckons us to pull up our socks, blow our nose, and get on with life

Just two chapters earlier in MT's gospel, for example, Jesus strides through a crowded marketplace, engages a paralytic beggar, and commands him to pick up his mat and go home

So Jesus seemingly walks both sides of the psychological street: he invites us to find rest for our souls while concurrently commanding that we stand up and walk into our future

Makes healthy sense to me

As we begin the 251st year of our national life, let's recommit to supporting the intra-dependent and extra-dependent dynamics of our common life

We all want to be strong, resilient and self-sufficient, able to pull up our boot straps and set our own courses with strong individual agency

At the same time, we get by with a little help from our friends and our nation

We depend on each other for daily support

We depend on national resources in times of tragedy or overwhelming weather events like upcoming hurricanes

We also depend on just laws that respect the dignity of all human beings

As Emma Lazarus wrote in her 1883 poem, *The New Colossus* and later immortalized on Lady Liberty, "Give me your tired, your poor"

Pope Leo wrote in the lead-up to yesterday's trip to Lampedusa, a key entry point for migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea, "We cannot grow accustomed to counting the dead. Human dignity has no passport and does not lose its value when crossing a border"

"In every generation, those who have arrived seeking freedom, opportunity and a place to belong have helped to shape the nation's character," the pope wrote in a letter to mark the United States 250th anniversary of independence. "To receive them with compassion and generosity is not only an act of charity, but also a recognition of the dignity that belongs to every human person."

In the words of our baptismal covenant and as we begin a new century of national life, we commit ourselves and our nation to respect the dignity of every human being.

Amid what I hope are the quieter days of summer, when you go for a long walk on the beach or set sail from the harbor, I invite you to reflect on Jesus's invitation—take my yoke upon you—along with Wilfred Bion's insights regarding our need both for intra- and extra-dependency as a core part of our human condition

Are you so self-sufficient that you end up being lonely and cut off from meaningful contact from others—are you at risk for getting by with no help from no friends?

At the other extreme, are you so dependent on others that you cannot decide whether to turn right or left without quaking?

Ideally, it may be more like the sailor who spends the day endlessly tacking and jibing in search of the sweet spot by which to move forward safely and efficiently amid the swift winds of life

Whatever our individual dependency longings and conflicts—whether with God or our neighbor—Saint Barnabas as its best models the community that sings Alleluia, Alleluia while struggling to make sense of it all