

Free Your Mind

March 1, 2026

Even before I was sure that I wanted to be a mom, I knew that if I ever became a parent, I was going to be a quirky parent. I mean—c'mon. (Gesture to the sanctuary.)

One of the ways that has shown up is that I sing. A lot. Many instructions are sung. Much of my redirection comes out as a tune.

My daughter is almost certainly going to carry a substantial disdain for the Rolling Stones into adulthood, because multiple times a week I ask, "What would Mick say?" and she knows she's supposed to respond, "You can't always get what you want."

Another song that I'm quite sure she'll bring up in therapy years from now is the 1992 En Vogue hit "Free Your Mind." Because when she's stuck, whether it's struggling to get her rain suit on or getting frustrated sounding out words, all too often I'll bellow, "Free your mind, and the rest will follow."

Sometimes it helps. Sometimes.

As I've been praying with our scriptures this week—God's promise through the prophet Ezekiel to take out hearts of stone and give hearts of flesh, and Jesus telling Nicodemus that he must be born again, or born from above—"Free your mind, and the rest will follow" has been looping in my head. Because both of these texts are about freedom. Not political freedom. Not freedom from responsibility. But freedom from the internal prisons we didn't even realize we were defending.

Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night. That detail matters. Night is when you can ask questions without being seen. Night offers privacy and anonymity. But it can also suggest covert motivations, not wanting to be seen.

Nicodemus is a Pharisee. A leader. A teacher. Someone who knows the rules, knows the scriptures, knows how things are supposed to work. And still—he sneaks out at night to talk to Jesus.

So here's a question worth sitting with this Lent: What do you need help understanding? What change do you need that is buried so deep within you that it's hard to even let it see the daylight?

Nicodemus is brave—but not in the way we usually define bravery. His courage isn't public. It isn't loud. It's vulnerable.

Jesus tells him, "No one can see the reign of God without being born from above." And Nicodemus does what we so often do when the Spirit starts talking about transformation—he panics and tries to literalize it.

"How can anyone be born after having grown old?"

In other words: How can I change without losing myself? How can I become different without admitting that what I've been doing isn't working?

Jesus responds not with instructions, but with poetry. "The wind blows where it chooses." You can feel it. You can hear it. But you cannot control it.

That's the part that gets us stuck. Because control feels safer than freedom. Stone feels safer than flesh.

Which brings us to Ezekiel. "I will remove from you your heart of stone," God says, "and give you a heart of flesh."

Notice what God does not say. God does not say, "Try harder." "Fix yourself." "Control this."

God says, I will do this. Let me do this. This is not self-improvement. This is grace.

Stone hearts are not evil. They are protective. They form when it feels like vulnerability will cost too much. When truth is punished. When authenticity is dangerous.

And that's why these texts matter right now. We are living in a moment when fear is being codified into law. This week, the state of Kansas passed a devastating and immoral anti-trans law—legislation designed not to protect life, but to control it. To legislate people back into hiding. To demand stone where God intends flesh.

And here is what must be said clearly, especially in the church: Trans people understand something essential about being born from above. They know the courage it takes to free your mind from what the world insists you must be. They know the cost of authenticity. They know what it means to trust that the life God is calling forth is more truthful than the fear trying to contain it.

That is not rebellion. That is resurrection work. And this is why Jesus insists that God's love is not about condemnation.

"God so loved the world," he says—not to control it, not to dominate it, not to remake it by force. God loves the world. The whole thing, not just the compliant parts.

Which matters when we look beyond ourselves. We are watching once again as violence is justified in the name of order—this time through the U.S. war on Iran, and the ever-dangerous fantasy of regime change. History tells us that forced transformation, whether of governments or of people, rarely leads to liberation. Forced transformation leads to suffering.

God's way is different. God does not coerce transformation. God invites it. God does not impose new hearts by force. God offers them in love.

And love, as Jesus tells Nicodemus, requires trust. Which brings us back to Lent. Lent is not about becoming better versions of ourselves through willpower. It is not about doubling down on

control. It is about loosening our grip. It is about freeing our minds from the lie that we must earn our worth, or hide our truth, or survive alone.

So I wonder this morning: What would it look like for you to be born from above, not into someone else's expectations, but into your own God-given life? What stone has formed in your heart that God is longing to replace with flesh? What help are you avoiding asking for? What myths and interpretations are you carrying around that are keeping your heart stony, that are keeping you from being born anew?

God wants to free your mind—what ways of looking at things are you clinging to that are inhibiting that? Who are you meeting in the night, quietly hoping for a word of life?

It's interesting. Nicodemus walks away from our passage unsatisfied. This passage doesn't tell us that he's miraculously transformed by his clandestine meeting with Jesus. ...but he DOES show up at the foot of the cross. This man who feared being seen in Jesus' company will eventually have the courage to publicly tend to Jesus' body after his execution.

So, don't be fooled by the televangelist stories of people being reborn in an instant. The Good News isn't that transformation will be easy, but rather, that God's love is an invitation, being offered again and again and again, freeing minds, softening hearts, and breathing life where fear once ruled.

Free your mind. The rest will follow. Amen.

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