

Questions Jesus Asks:

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"What do you want me to do for you?"

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Mark 10:35-52

³⁵Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

³⁶"What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

³⁷They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

³⁸"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

³⁹"We can," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, ⁴⁰but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

⁴¹When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.

⁴²Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.

⁴⁵For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

⁴⁶Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means "son of Timaeus"), was sitting by the roadside begging. ⁴⁷When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

⁴⁸Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

⁴⁹Jesus stopped and said, "Call him."

So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you."

⁵⁰Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

⁵¹"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him.

The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see."

⁵²"Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

Imagine you have dinner reservations at a well-known restaurant in Zurich.

You have been anticipating it, as one must make reservations months in advance. The name of the restaurant? "Blindekuh" which literally translated means "blind cow"; but it is also the name for the children's game, "Blind Man's Bluff". In other words, diners dine in complete darkness! Inspired by a blind Swiss pastor named Jurg Spielmann, he was known to routinely blindfold guests who came to his house for dinner. Why? He said they paid more attention to the food that way, and they also listened to each other better!

Apparently the idea caught on, as one can also dine in the dark in Paris, Montreal, and Tel Aviv.* (Or in Enumclaw during a winter power outage!)

(* Learning to Walk in the Dark, but Barbara Brown Taylor, p.93-94)

Jesus asks the very same question of three different people in this passage of Mark's Gospel: "What do you want me to do for you?"

The context is significant: This is 2/3 of the way through Mark's Gospel. Several things have been happening simultaneously:

One, Jesus has been teaching about his coming Kingdom.

Two, just prior to being approached by James and John, Jesus has made his third and final prediction of his death.

Three, Jesus and his disciples are on their way to Jerusalem. That is where Jesus will die.

This is the context in which the "question-able" encounters occur.

Perhaps James and John, the Zebedee brothers, needed hearing aids! Clearly, they were not listening to Jesus, because Jesus had just told them that once they get to Jerusalem, he/Jesus would be delivered to the Chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death, hand him over to the Gentiles/Romans, who will mock him, spit on him, flog him and kill him.

That's what they, as Jesus' disciples, can look forward to...So, I don't know what those boys were thinking, BUT, clearly their heads are somewhere else! At the very least they were hearing only what they wanted to hear, which is called 'selective hearing'.

Whatever, consider the question Jesus asked:

"What do you want me to do for you?"

The disciples want a favor, that is, to be shown favoritism. If there are twelve disciples, and there are only two seats of honor—one at the right and one at the left of the King--these two want to get “dibs”. Do the math—there are twelve disciples and only two seats of honor. They want to be first in line for the prime seating assignments in the Kingdom of God. Of course, they will concede the throne to Jesus, but those other two coveted places will be up for grabs! We note later from the reaction of the other ten, that they are indignant, mad, upset! Why? Because these two got there first? Because they were pushed aside so the brothers could get to the front of the line? Their indignation indicates that the other ten are no better than these two brothers, they just are not present!

James and John want a piece of the action, power, influence, recognition, applause. Their request is audacious and presumptuous! (But they were nicknamed “sons of thunder” for a reason!) In their request, **they totally miss the point of everything** Jesus had been teaching! So he teaches them once again!

Jesus raises more questions: Can you drink this cup of suffering, can you endure this baptism of pain? They glibly reply in the affirmative!

Even Jesus says: “You don't know what you are asking!” (Ultimately he tells them the seating arrangements are not up to him!) These two seem oblivious to the cost of discipleship--they want the glory without the cross.

Jesus then gathers all twelve and attempts to set them straight again: In contrast with the world's paradigm of power, Jesus emphasizes that the greatest one in the Kingdom of God, is the servant of all. The highest position is actually attained by the one who can go the lowest in order to serve others, letting others go first. It is not a position of power but of weakness, of whom Jesus himself is the primary example.

“What do you want me to do for you?”

As they continue on their journey to Jerusalem, they pass a blind beggar by the roadside. His very location indicates that this man is out of the mainstream of society. He is sidelined. By the end of this encounter, he is “on the road”, no longer a bystander but a disciple. (J. Edwards, p. 329)

Of all the people that Jesus healed during his ministry this blind man is the only one whose name is recorded. Countless others are healed, but their names are omitted from the pages of scripture!

I love that Bartimaeus is named. He is not anonymous! Although he is poor, although he is disabled/differently-abled--he is named. He is not defined by his disability. He is SEEN. He is HEARD. He is taken seriously.

He is a marginalized person: one we can and do, easily ignore or dismiss. Jesus treats Bartimaeus as a real **person, with real needs and desires. Jesus does not presume to know the answer to the question that he asks!**

In contrast to the clueless Zebedee boys, Bartimaeus not only has a clue, he has Jesus' number--he perceives Jesus' true identity: ***"SON OF DAVID....Teacher----- Have mercy on me...!"***

Bartimaeus is desperate. He will not be deterred. Though the crowd would attempt to shut him up, Bartimaeus is persistent. He cries out consistently until Jesus responds.

While Bartimaeus is sightless, he possesses insight. Bartimaeus lacks physical sight, but he possesses spiritual vision! While Bartimaeus is SEEN by Jesus, Bartimaeus SEES Jesus for who he really is. The Zebedee brothers are full of themselves, Bartimaeus is full of faith.

Jesus asks Bartimaeus: **What do you want Me to do for you?**

Is this a silly question? The answer seems obvious! Duh.

But in the asking, Jesus does not presume. Jesus treats Bartimaeus as a human being with a mind and a heart and desires that are uniquely his. This is instructive to us.

Last summer a group of 10 adults and 6 teens from Calvary spent several days working alongside the folks at the Tahoma Hope L'arche Farm in Tacoma. L'arche is an international organization whose mission statement says the following: "Our

mission is to make known the gift of people with intellectual disabilities, working together toward a more humane society.”

They accomplish this mission through residential communities in which core members—those with intellectual disabilities—are paired with an assistant. Together they live and work, worship and have fun in Christian community.

Those who can learn skills, are taught them, so they contribute to the life of the community. That is what happens at the Tahoma Hope Farm—core members work on the farm—planting, weeding, pruning, transplanting, watering, etc. Produce, fresh flowers and honey are sold at a roadside stand, and in local farmer’s markets, as well as enjoyed by them in their own residential community.

It was an amazing experience for us to come and work alongside these folks. Each morning began as we gathered in a large circle outside, sharing our name, our thumbs up/down for how we were feeling, and a word about something for which we were thankful. One morning, Gabby the Farm manager shared these “Disability Beattitudes” with us before the morning prayer and our work beginning. Here are a few of them.

Blessed are you who take time to listen to my unique speech, for you help me know that if I persevere, I can be understood.

Blessed are you who never bid me “hurry up”, or snatch tasks from hands and do them for me, for often I need time rather than help.

Blessed are you who ask for my help, for my greatest need is to be needed.

Blessed are those who forget my disability of body and see the shape of my soul.

Blessed are those who see me as a whole person, unique and complete, and not as a “half” or one of God’s mistakes.

Blessed are those who love me just as I am, without wondering what I might have been like otherwise.

We can learn from Jesus and from L'arche how to value every person created in the image of God!

Sometimes in dealing with differently abled people, we make assumptions. Bartimaeus might have responded: "What I want most is to be reconciled to my parents" or "I want a small apartment and a monthly disability check."

BUT

By asking, Jesus respects him and allows Bartimaeus to participate in his own healing by inviting him into a relationship. ***His sight is restored and he follows Jesus! His faith is rewarded!***

Sometimes ***what we desire, what we ask for, what we need, and what we receive***, are different things. God like every good parent, wants to give us what we want, but God knows best. Indeed, it is well that we do not always get what we ask for in prayer!

In the first of the Harry Potter books, Harry finds himself in one of the mysterious rooms in Hogwarts, the boarding school he attends. In this room he discovers a full size, mirror in an ornate frame. When he peers into the looking glass, he sees an amazing sight: His parents appear to stand behind him in the reflection. As an orphan, Harry has longed to see his parents whom he deeply misses.

Thrilled with this experience, Harry runs to find his best friend Ron, with whom he wants to share this discovery. But when Ron looks into the mirror, he sees something quite different. He does not see Harry's parents. Instead he sees himself being carried on the shoulders of his soccer teammates, being cheered as the one who made the game winning goal!

Perplexed, the boys cautiously approach Professor Dumbledore, telling him about their discovery and their different experiences. Dumbledore explains: this magical mirror has a very special ability to reflect back to the one who looks into it, "their true heart's desire".

This explains why Harry and Ron see different images when they peer into the magic mirror. Each one sees what he most wants in the world. Harry yearned for a connection with his parents, Ron who suffers from chronic low self esteem yearns for the approval of his peers!

Sometimes when Jesus asks: “What do you want me to do for you?” he not only gives what is asked for, but what is needed as well. Jesus understands human nature. He understands that...” beneath the request for healing is a request for a deeper, often unspoken [need for the] healing of the soul that offers the only true hope of happiness and wholeness.” (What Did Jesus Ask? Gene Robinson, p. 136-137)

This question lays bare the responders’ true motives, revealing whether we seek our own glory or the glory of God. Bartimaeus asks for faith, James and John ask for fame; Bartimaeus wants to follow Jesus “on the way”, James and John want to sit with him in glory. (J. Edwards, p. 321)

How would you respond to this question that Jesus asks: “What do you want me to do for you?”

Pray:

Lord you encourage us to ask for our hearts desire! This is the heart of the daring dialogue we call prayer. May we be bold in our asking, but temper our self-serving desires and...heal us...give us insight...give us faith enough to follow you to hard places...Make us more like Jesus we pray, Amen.