

What Do You Want Me To Do For You?

Matthew 7:7-11

Mark 10:46-52

Mark 10:46-52

46 They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. 47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' 48 Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' 49 Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him here.' And they called the blind man, saying to him, 'Take heart; get up, he is calling you.' 50 So tossing aside his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. 51 Then Jesus said to him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man said to him, 'My teacher, let me see again.' 52 Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has made you well.' Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

This is the word of the Lord.

If you found the proverbial lamp, rubbed it, and out came the genie who said they would grant you three wishes, what would you wish for? And no wishing for more wishes; that's cheating! Better yet:

If Jesus appeared to you in the flesh—the risen Christ is with you by the Holy Spirit, but if he appeared in the flesh and asked you the question, "What do you want me to do for you?" how would you answer that? I wonder how / would answer that?

At first we might say something like, "I'd like a new car" or "I'd like to win the lottery." Some of us might ask for a health problem to be resolved, or a more

favorable financial situation, or to stop feeling anxious or worrying about things. Most of us would probably pray for world peace, or for our country's challenges to be resolved, but for our purposes in reflecting on this account from Mark, this question is more personal to you, and to me. Jesus asks, what do you want me to do for *you*?

So we might ask for one or more of these other things, but then we might think, "Wait a minute. I've got this one chance to ask God in human form what I really want; so, is that what I really want?" And if we dug a little deeper, we'd probably ask for something other than a new car, or to win the lottery; or maybe even for a health issue to be resolved. Maybe our request would be for new friendships or reconciled family relationships, or a sense of significance and purpose—because we may wonder, what is my purpose in life? Or, what is my purpose *now*, at this point in my life? I felt like I had purpose in the past, but now I feel kind of lost.

Or maybe we'd say, "Lord, save me from this bad habit I can't get rid of, or take away my internal struggles and silence the chatter going on in my head." Then if we kept digging down still deeper, maybe what we would end up asking for, the bottom line, is a sense that God is always with you, and me, that we would know that for sure—with 100% confidence.

Or maybe what we want is what a friend of mine calls beach ball joy, the kind that doesn't stay down no matter what the circumstances, that just keeps bouncing back up. Deep joy that can't be squelched. Because if we had that, with 100% confidence that God is always with us, we could handle anything, right?

If you dug down deep, what do you want more than anything else? What do you truly want Jesus to do for you? We might want to be careful how we answer that, because our first instinct, our reflexive response, may **not** be the thing that we *really* want. Because...

I'm not sure we always know what we really want. One dad I know talks about a time his six-year-old daughter saw him carrying a folder that had the word "insurance" on it. She asked what it was for. He said it was his life insurance policy. She asked, "What's life insurance?" Caught a bit off guard, he said, "Well, it means that if something should happen to me and I die, you'll get some money so you'll be taken care of." She got real serious for a moment (the dad assuming she was thinking about him being gone). Then her eyes got really wide again, and she said, "Is the money just for me or do I have to share it with the family after you die?"

That's probably not what she really wants (the money), but at first the thought is kind of exciting, isn't it? We don't always know what we really want, but we think we do, don't we—especially at first?

As an example of that, it's interesting to note that just before Jesus asks blind Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" he asks two of his disciples the exact same question. They're pretty sure they know what they want; at least they think they do. This is the passage from last Sunday (Mark 10:35-f):

"Then James and John came to him. 'Teacher,' they said, 'we want you to do for us whatever we ask.' And Jesus said to them, 'What do you want me to do for you?' And they said to him, 'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left in glory.' (In other words, "Make us vice-president and chief of staff.") Jesus said to them, (paraphrasing) "Is that what you really want?" Then Jesus gives them a little talk about servanthood and humility.

Jesus says, "I don't think you really want that, because we're about to enter Jerusalem, where I am going to suffer and will be crucified. Are you ready to endure the same for yourselves?"

They thought they knew what they really wanted, but they didn't.

Note: these two stories are given to us by Mark, one right after the other, to contrast the two attitudes at play here: the attitude of privilege on the part of

the 'insiders,' with the humble attitude of an 'outsider.' James and John represent the insiders—they've been following Jesus for three years by this time, and they should know better than to expect privilege. And they are not only insiders, but insider-insiders, part of the trio of Peter, James and John; Jesus' closest leadership core; if anybody should get it about humility, they should.

Contrast them with the outsider or outcast blind man Bartimaeus, who humbly requests that his most pressing need be met. Mark, our gospel writer, is posting a warning here: being around Jesus for a long time does not grant us entitlement—in the way James and John expected it. The blind man, Bartimaeus, by contrast to James and John, cries out for *mercy*; he approaches Jesus with humility. And courage & confidence too! It's a humble courage, and simple trust.

So there is a bit of a warning here, but there is also great encouragement:

The question that Jesus asks both James and John, and Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" is a question, like the other questions that Jesus asks, that can be transformative. It can be transformative in two ways:

For starters, it shows that **we can ask God anything**, even when our motives might be mixed, or not quite mature. We can ask God anything, in prayer.

When it comes to prayer, some people's approach is, "Well, I don't want to bother God with my little prayer request. I'm sure God is busy with the whole Middle East thing and all that." Or maybe we think, "Well, if God already knows our needs before we ask (as he taught in the sermon on the mount), then why should I bother him by asking?" Or how about, "Well, I shouldn't pray for myself, I should only pray for other people, or for world peace, or something really important."

Those are all true, and have merit, however I think the point of Jesus' question is that he wants to hear what's on our hearts, because it's mostly about relationship with him. And he wants us to voice our needs and requests for ourselves too, especially in our times of need. It's good for us to say them, to speak them out. Yes, Jesus did say in the sermon on the mount that we don't need to be wordy in prayer, because your father knows what you need before you ask. But he didn't say *don't ask*. His point there is, you don't have to say a lot because your heavenly Father is already listening, and knows you well. So, **do** make your requests. And be persistent in asking. It just doesn't have to be wordy, and we don't have to stress out about it being perfectly stated. Now God may not give us everything we ask, or not yet, because it might not be what's best

for us at that time—but God wants us to ask anyway. After all, Jesus is the one asking the question, “What do you want me to do for you?”

Everyone who has, or has had children knows this principle. Our kids have asked for all kinds of things over the years, and Heidi and I have not given them everything they ask for because not everything they ask for is what they really need, or ought to have. Or at least not right away. But, we want them to keep asking anyway, because eventually they get it right, and no matter what, it keeps the relationship active and dynamic. I would rather they ask for wrong things than not talk to us at all.

God wants us, his children, to keep talking to him, and to keep answering this question because eventually we will get it right.

God knows what is best for us and he wants to give us nothing but his best. Now, I know that a common question is raised at this point, “What about when we ask for really good things, like cancer to be cured, or for an unemployed person to find meaningful work, or something like that, but it doesn’t happen?” That is a great question, and it can’t be fully answered it here.

But I will say that all of us have experienced the mystery—and perhaps the pain—of unanswered prayer, when we or someone we know doesn’t receive healing, or we/they don’t get that job, or their financial situation gets worse

instead of better. What do we do with that? It's a great question and deserves a lot more time. But in our experiences of unanswered prayer there is an opportunity for us to keep asking, keep seeking, keep pursuing God, to keep praying, to keep acting in faith, to stay in community with other Jesus followers who will listen to us and with us as we wrestle with our prayer challenges, as we all somehow learn to trust God more.

God wants relationship with us more than anything else. And, as Jesus told us, we can trust God with giving us good gifts when we ask.

So when Jesus asks, what do you want me to do for you? and you reply, but your reply doesn't seem to be answered right away, keep pursuing God. We can respond to Jesus' question with anything, and he won't turn us away. Over time we will learn that our response to the question "What do you want me to do for you?" might change.

Which leads to...

The second encouragement that this question reveals: that **Jesus helps us discover what we really want, because we don't always know.** When Jesus asks us, "What do you want me to do for you?" it makes us think, and reflect on our true needs and desires.

I read this the other day: Psalm 37:4: “Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.” And in Psalm 20:4: “May God grant you your heart’s desire.” And I thought, what do I desire? Really desire. What do I want Jesus to do for me? I’m still thinking about that by the way. And the answer to that changes over time, right? If I we were answering that 10 or 15 years ago, our answer would be quite different from now.

And this is the brilliance of the question; it slows us down and makes us think and take the time to reflect on what we really, truly want. Jesus’ question helps us discover what our true needs and desires are, so we can respond with confidence to his question, and with an assurance that he will respond. And he wants us to have that assurance, once we have taken the time to reflect on our wants and desires.

In preparation for today’s message, I looked at all of the places where someone made a request of Jesus (good or bad!). It was almost always a request for healing, because that’s what Jesus became famous for; the word on the street was that he made people well. But in each case, the person who approached Jesus did so with courage and confidence. They all approached Jesus with courage and confidence.

Bartimaeus is no exception. He cries out from the side of the road even though people are telling him to be quiet; so, he shows *courage*. He knows who Jesus is (calls him “son of David”), so he has *confidence*; he has confidence that Jesus can heal him (and Jesus affirms it: “Your faith has made you well”).

This challenges me, because sometimes my prayers are pretty timid, and anything but courageous and confident... *“Oh Lord, if you want to; if I’m not bothering you too much; I know I don’t deserve anything...”* That isn’t true humility, but hedging against disappointment. So I don’t get my expectations up too much. No, we’re invited to pray with courage and confidence. Even if our prayers aren’t answered right way. That’s why Jesus told a couple parables about persevering in prayer, and being persistent.

Every person who approached Jesus did so with courage and confidence. And Jesus himself teaches us to do so: “Ask, seek, knock,” as we heard in the first reading. These three words represent an ascending scale of urgency: Asking is kind of low key; seeking takes it up a notch; then knocking says, “Hey, anybody home??” I think they are really three ways of saying the same thing: be courageous and confident.

And the grammar here suggests ongoing action: keep asking, keep searching, keep knocking. I used to say to my kids, when we got in the car, “Put on your seat belt.” That’s a one-time instruction. But it’s another thing to say to them, “Every time you get in the car, put your seatbelt on.” That’s the intent of these words from Jesus. Every time you pray, be courageous and confident in prayer. Because your heavenly father gives good gifts to his children. Again, we may not get an answer right away, so we can keep praying; even if our prayer is simply, “Show me what I truly need.”

Hebrews 10:19-22: “since we have *confidence* to enter God’s presence through Christ, let us approach our Father with a sincere heart, in full assurance of faith.”

Now “full assurance” is easier said than done. I don’t know anyone who has full assurance. But it helps to know, and remember, that the door that we knock on is actually already open. Ever done that? At someone’s house, or in an office, where a door is open but you knock anyway? And the person inside—in this case, Jesus—greeted you warmly, with a look of joy and welcome, as you sit down to talk; as he asks you, “What do you want me to do for you?” How will you answer?

Sweet Hour of Prayer