

What Do You Want?

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 throwing off 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.

Have you ever tried to help someone or had someone try to help you, but weren't clear about the true issue at hand. Any good customer service representative is going to ask the question: "How can I help you today?" Anyone trained in the areas of social work or counseling is going to try to understand your desire before trying to give you advice or solutions to your situation. "What do you want?" What do you need."

We often assume we understand another's situation, life, challenges, hardships and issues. Then like a good neighbor we rush to meet those perceived needs. Like our scripture from last week we think we are in the right position and have the authority to influence people for the good. But we too often don't ask what the other person wants or needs. In our scripture today Jesus models leadership and concern. He had turned his eyes and feet toward Jerusalem and his purpose for coming to earth, but still had time to ask the appropriate questions and help someone in need.

In last week's scripture James and John, apparently confident insiders, had just been asked the same question Jesus asked of the quintessential outsider: "What do you want me to do for you?" The answer of the presumptive faithful had varied little from the beginning: "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." The plea of the presumed reprobate, crying out for God's mercy, sounds a counter petition that is, itself, a confession: "Rabbouni, let me see again" (v. 51). The James and

John's answer rested on well-established religious laurels, Bartimaeus' petition issued from darkness and doubt; the one request would sidestep suffering, the other was forged out of loss, exclusion, and helplessness; the one was bent on an exclusive claim to righteousness, the other was bowed down in need before the Son who alone is righteous. This story reveals something of the nature of our ministry to both insiders and outsiders.

In the first place, Jesus was surrounded by selected and self-defined insiders as he quickly passed through Jericho. He was buffered by people who wanted to be identified with him. Mark did not say that they were at his side in order to be healed or taught, only that they were in his company. Often unmindful of what they wanted Jesus to do for them, they nevertheless wanted to be numbered among the faithful. Once in that number, those on the "inside" curiously act, time and again, to keep others on the "outside." In spite of the fact that Jesus had just finished telling the disciples how the first must become last, Mark reports no contrary voice to the *many* that sternly ordered Bartimaeus to be quiet (v. 48). Only when Jesus himself ordered the crowd to "Call him here" did the crowd feign pious hospitality, saying, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you" (v. 49).

What are we to make of Jesus' response to the crowd, and so of our ministry to the many who may want to be near Jesus while keeping our distance from another in need of his healing and help? In the first place, Jesus' inattention to the crowd was noteworthy. Other than commanding them to call the outsider to his side, he simply let them be. He did not upbraid them for their blindness to human need, nor did he call their faithfulness into question. Rather, in his command to "Call him here" he was also commanding the gathered crowd to become the disciples they would not be without this very specific act of obedience. Given that in Jesus the blind received their sight, the lame walked, and the lepers were cleansed, those who simply wanted to be near him would find themselves in the company his love commanded them to keep.

The faithful find ourselves in this company today, as members and leaders of Christ's church, we are commanded to be the church—in Christ's name! Following Jesus, we need

not scold those who have no idea what they want Jesus to do for them, nor call their faithfulness into question. Rather, as we call the community to attend to the other's cry for mercy, whether the other is as distant as Darfur or as close as the closet, we obediently gather a crowd around what God is doing in the world "to make and keep human life human." The cry of need that caused Bartimaeus to be shunned by many becomes the occasion for our glimpse of God's final intention for creation.

This glimpse is called a miracle. Miracles are those events that bring people from darkness into the light. Miracles turn our attention to what really matters in life and in death. Miracles claim no power, but reveal a Power who wills to be known. Miracles point beyond the one before us to the One who made us for love's sake. "Miracle, as such," wrote Rudolf Bultmann, "means the activity of God."

In the second place, then, this story invites us to consider our own ministry to the outsider, the voice silenced by institutional pronouncements and rules, the so-called reprobate whose cry stands us still in our tracks. How easy it is to let the manageable needs of our congregation buffer us from those who await word of God's mercy on the margins, especially at this time of the year! There are sermons to deliver, outreach programs to get up and running, buildings to keep in repair. Yet here is a man who threw off his cloak, sprang up, and went to Jesus with great expectation and a disarming clarity. "Rabbouni, let me see again," he pleaded. Think of those for whom faith is matter of life and death rather than social convention. When our ministry is marked by encounters with the blind who want to see, the lame who want to walk, the leper who wants to be cleansed, the sick who wants to be healed, the hungry who wants to be fed, the thirsty who wants a drink of clean water, we catch a glimpse of what it must be to come close to Jesus. For through them we hear the word he speaks to us anew.

"I am thinking about Jesus," wrote the woman who was baptized at age eighty-four. She appeared one Advent, asking about the whereabouts of a church advertised brunch. She never left. "If I had been in Hitler's Germany," she once told her pastor, "I would be a

lampshade." The crowd often wished she would be silent or just leave others alone. I selfishly seek her out, said her pastor. The most theologically astute member of the congregation, she reads Barth, Pelikan, Reinhold Niebuhr. But more to the point, she knows just what she wants Jesus to do for her. "Often, I think about Jesus when I have a particular difficulty with people. I think of Jesus coming into the room. I do not need to explain to him. He understands. He sees an ancient person, scorned, misunderstood. I know what he would say. I have no doubt. I know that he would understand all that I cared about with such great passion, to speak the truth, to live the truth." **Cynthia A. Jarvis** In our community of faith I think of Minister Millie Nash, who is always clear about what she wants from Jesus. Last week Linda attended a concert at United Christian Church in Detroit and we encountered another of God's children who others want to be quite. But Brother Tony will not be silenced...he will call out to Jesus in his own way!

In our scripture this blind man is portrayed as a model of Christian discipleship. He came to Jesus and did so by casting aside his cloak. It is quite reasonable to regard his cloak as representing his most treasured possession. It had kept him warm through the cold nights. It may also have held the meager spoils of his begging. In his act of throwing off his cloak, we see the image of one who leaves his former life behind. To those who have always known honor, power, affluence, and prestige, this image reminds us of the transforming effect of the gospel to call forth a life of dramatic change.

Bartimaeus is also a model of discipleship because he is a person of faith (10:52). His capacity to see and comprehend reminds us that the disciples seem not to perceive or understand, to see or to hear (8:14-21). In this passage, Jesus drew attention to the faith of Bartimaeus (cf. 2:5); and we are invited through the words of Jesus to see the relationship between faith and wholeness, faith and salvation. These elements are powerfully combined when we hear and respond to the words of mercy: Go, your faith has made you well. Go, your faith has healed you. Go, your faith has made you whole. **Lincoln E.**

Galloway

We are given the opportunity to answer Jesus when he asks: "What do you want?" – but we can ask others the same question and minister to their needs.

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