

What Do You Want?

Mark 10:46-52

Once again, someone from the fringes comes to Jesus. Like the children and like the women, a blind man, a blind beggar calls. Jesus is with his followers. They are continuing a journey toward Jerusalem and come to their last stop, the town of Jericho.

The group is rounding the bend on the road out of Jericho before the long uphill walk to Jerusalem. This is the route of religious pilgrims. All the beggars in Jericho know to wait there for the travelers. A combination of religious fervor, guilt, and compassion results in more money for the beggars.

Travelers to Jerusalem walk along the same road traveled in reverse by the Good Samaritan in Jesus' famous parable.

On the way out of town, a man screams out to Jesus and his followers. "Jesus! Son of David, have mercy on me!" The blind beggar had heard it was the teacher who healed people. "Heal me!"

Jesus stopped and stood still. "Call him here."

"Hey, beggar, you're in luck. The teacher's calling you to come."

Bartimaeus – the name meant literally "son of" Timaeus or, according to some scholars, son of *the unclean*. Bartimaeus did not hesitate. He threw down his cloak, his only possession, sprang up, came to Jesus in a hurry.

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

There was no hesitation and no doubt. "My teacher, let me see again."

Go! Your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way. What do you notice about this exchange compared to another exchange Jesus had had earlier on this same journey – his encounter with the wealthy young man?

Bartimaeus' exchange with Jesus stands in contrast with the rich man who walked away sadly. Both seemed to know what they wanted. The rich man wanted eternal life and the blind man wanted to see again. Jesus told both of them to get up and come. Bartimaeus jumped up eagerly. He let go of his worldly possessions to come to Jesus without even being told. He was open to what Jesus had to give him. The rich man walked away sadly when Jesus told him to give all his possessions to the poor. He was not open to what Jesus had to give him.

What do you want? There was no question. "I want to see."

"No problem. Your faith has brought you healing."

The blind man followed Jesus along the way.

Another contrast was the exchange Jesus had with two of his disciples. James and John came to Jesus who asks them, "What do you want?" They wanted a place of privilege, prestige, and power in Jesus' kingdom. "You don't know what you're asking. That is not mine to give anyway. I can give you the opportunity to experience my cup and my baptism. Walk with me and suffer with me."

"Thanks anyway, Jesus. That's not quite what we had in mind."

Blind Bartimaeus knew what he wanted. He came to Jesus. He got it and followed. The rich young man had walked away sadly. He didn't follow. In this cast, the first became last. Bartimaeus and the crowd of the poor followed Jesus out of Jericho. The last had become first.

You have to know what you want. Sometimes, you have to decide what you want. What is the secret of life? Maybe it's to get what you want, We often discover, however, that

it's not what you want when you get it. Jesus was teaching his followers about wants on this journey to Jerusalem. Jesus was teaching them, and us, to be clear what we really want. He was teaching them, and us, to learn to want what is ultimately worth wanting. Pastor Gordon Cosby once wrote:

When I reflect deeply on my life and what I really want, it is not to be afraid. When I am afraid, I am miserable. I play it safe. I restrict myself. I hide the talent of me in the ground. I am not deeply alive – the depths of me are not being expressed.” (quoted in Elizabeth O'Connor's *Cry Pain, Cry Hope*)

Jesus knew that the issue of *wants* usually gets caught up with our fear and bound up around our money and relationships, including our relationship with God. Discovering, or maybe deciding, what we want – what we really want -- usually becomes a matter of discovering or deciding who we are underneath all the accumulation of messages, false images, and borrowed self.

Our deepest and most powerful wants arise from the authentic self deep within each of us. It is the source from which we want, from which we long for, relationship with God and deep relationship with each other. This is the self that lives in partnership with God, that finds a home on the *way of the cross*. This is the self that communes with Jesus and, through Jesus, with God.

I ask God, “Show me your will for my life.” And God says what? “You show me your will for your life.”

“But God, I don't know what I really want. What I want to know is what I really want! I want to know who I really am”.

What do you think the Spirit tells us? “Maybe you do know who you are and what you want. Maybe you're just out of touch with it. Maybe it's covered up with *shoulds* and *shouldn'ts*? Maybe we're a little afraid of who we really are -- what we really want.

One night, the great Rabbi Yehuda dreamt that he had died and stood before the angel at the entrance to heaven.. “Who are you?” the angel asked. “I am Rabbi Yehuda of Prague. Please tell me if my name is written in the Book of Names of those who will share in God's kingdom.” “Wait here. I will read the names.” The angel read thousands of names. All who had died that day were written in the book. They were strange names to Rabbi Yehuda.

The angel finished reading at last and Rabbi Yehuda's name had not been read. He wept bitterly. The angel said, “I called your name”. “I did not hear it.” The angels explained, “All names are written in the book because all inherit the kingdom, but many who come here have never heard their true names on the lips of man or angels. They don't recognize their names when they are called to their share of the kingdom. Because they do not hear their names as their own, they must wait here until they hear their names and know them. Perhaps in their lifetime, someone has once called them by their right name, they'll remember. Perhaps no one has ever called them by their right name. Some wait here until they become silent enough to hear the King of the Universe himself calling them.”

Rabbi Yehuda awoke, fell to the floor, and prayed desperately, “Master of the Universe, grant me once before I die to hear my own true name on the lips of my brothers”.

At last, he knew that what he wanted was to know who he was.

The Bible tells us that people came to Jesus telling him what they wanted. The cost of what these people wanted in these stories was too high for the wealthy and powerful. It was gladly paid by the poor and outcast. His wealth stood in the way of what the rich young man said he wanted. His culture and his religion told him he was entitled because he was a man and because he was wealthy. They colluded with him to feed his addiction to wealth and status. But in the presence of Jesus he saw and knew what he wanted. He also saw the cost and the weight of his addiction caused him to walk away sad. He did not listen to the wisdom of his grief. Still he walked away.

It was not being wealthy that caused him to miss the Kingdom, that caused him to walk away from Jesus. Wealth, like status and prestige, distances us from those who suffer. Wealth insulates and isolates us from issues of pain, powerlessness, and poverty. Wealth lets us look past suffering in the world. (Robert Inchausti, *Subversive Orthodoxy*)

Jesus’ disciples’ image of power and reward stood in their way of hearing Jesus’ true message. Later, however, through the disorientation of the cross and resurrection, they found what they were not able to see before and the *way of the cross* led them to life.

The women and children around Jesus knew what they wanted. They had nothing, or at least next to nothing, yet they were ready to embrace what Jesus offered them: equal rights and a place at the table. This dream fulfilled for them seemed like a nightmare for the men of wealth, status, and power. The blind beggar called Bartimaeus knew exactly what he wanted. He wanted to see and gladly received this gift from Jesus.

Life is, in some sense, like *carnival* game, that game where you try to keep your eye on the cup under which lies a marker while the confidence man tries to make you lose track. This image is never more evident than in the midst of a consumer society or during a political campaign. Candidates, their parties, the experts, advertisers, and special interest groups with enough money are vying for our attention. They’re all dying to tell us who we are and what we want.

The heart of Jesus’ message was Jesus himself. The title he always took for himself in the gospels was the *Son of Man*. Several modern versions of the Bible translate it *The Human One*. Jesus embodies what it means to be fully human. He was a person! He knew who he was as a human being.

Jesus was an authentic self and that’s what he calls us to become. That is the mission he sets before us: to discover and live out of our authentic self, the self God made us to be. Jesus never called us to be Christians. Pastor and author Brian McClaren suggests, in his book *A Generous Orthodoxy*, that if Jesus were here today as a human being, he probably wouldn’t be Christian. He might well be embarrassed or repelled by what generations of his *disciples* have done in his name.

As we seek to follow Jesus today, he challenges us not to mark our religious territory with creeds and theological barriers, but to look within ourselves to find God, to look around ourselves to our communities and find ourselves and God. I want to live this way. I want not to be afraid, not to play it safe, and not to hide the talent of me. I want to be deeply alive and to express the depths of me. I want to follow Jesus,. I want to walk with Jesus along this journey, step by step. What do you want?