

What Do You Want: Is It Worth Wanting?

Mark 10:35-45

Sometimes people just don't get it! Jesus' disciples didn't seem to get it quite often such as in today's story. James and John said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do something for us." Jesus replied, "What is it?" In other words, "What do you want?"

They told him: "Give us the right to sit with you, one at the right and the other at your left, in your glory."

"You don't know what you're asking," responded Jesus.

What were James and John asking? What did they want? They sized up their situation and moved to act, thinking of their own advantage. It's the way you get ahead, right? They were engaging in strategic decision making, securing status and power in the new kingdom. They were thinking about honor and not realizing that Jesus was talking about sacrifice. They were wanting to receive glory, while Jesus was talking about confronting the entrenched power of Rome and the temple authority – and suffering the consequences. They were hoping to take advantage of the system, but Jesus was trying to teach them that he was ditching the current system altogether.

What James and John wanted was not worth wanting. It cost them broken relationship as it stirred resentment in the other disciples. They completely missed what Jesus was after and had a mistaken view of power, leadership, and success. James and John wanted to get ahead -- wanted to be power players in Jesus' new regime. They had no clue that Jesus wasn't trying to take over an existing power structure, but was intent on getting rid of it and replacing it with a new approach – that leaders serve. "Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not to be served."

What should we want according to Jesus? It is certainly not to be a doormat. We are called to be bold and courageous, but not within the value-scheme of the *status quo*. We are called to challenge the *powers that be*, to oppose the domination of the many by the few and wealth garnered by few while the many share what's left over.

In Jesus' day, those in power – the Romans and the Jewish leaders who were cooperating with the Romans -- owned all the means of wealth and opportunity. They used their advantage to exploit the system and gain more. In our day and in this country, wealth is increasingly controlled by a tiny percentage of people who have undue influence on lawmakers. They end up skewing the rules of the system to get more wealth.

Jesus' solution was not to turn the tables and grab favored status, but to stop the system of exploitation, greed, and domination. His vision was of leaders who serve and work for the best interest of all people. This was where Jesus was headed as he turned his sight to go to Jerusalem.

The values of God include servant leadership where success is not measured by power over others or money in the bank. Success in the value system of Jesus means the well-being of all people, the inclusion of people on the margins of life. It includes justice as discerning what belongs to whom and returning it to them (Breuggemann) and mercy as giving opportunity to those who are shut out -- not enabling irresponsible behavior, but giving people second chances and third chances. Success is not perpetuating inequity across the generations, entrenched through racism and other forms of bigotry and exclusion, but creating systems for new life, new

opportunity, and hope for people mired in despair. It is waking up to the living presence of God around us and within us mediated most often through other people and through the natural world.

This was what Jesus lived and taught and wanted his disciples to see. This was his dream and he knew that realizing this vision would not be easy. It would not be painless. It would only be brought about with a great sense of purpose and significant sacrifice.

What do you want? Is it worth the wanting? Is it worth sacrifice to accomplish? You may have heard that I am in the process of having one on one conversations with every member of this congregation -- at least that's my hope. The first question is, "What is your dream?" In other words, "what do you want for your life?" The second question is, "What do you want for this church?" "What are your dreams for this congregation?"

The two disciples who ask for favored positions are told by Jesus that they don't know what they're asking. Could the same be said about us? Are the things you want for your life and for this church worth the wanting according to Jesus' criteria? How often what we think we want is not really worthy of the wanting? How would Jesus say we should measure our wants and determine a worthy value?

The final and most important question is this: what do we seek behind our dreams and beyond our wants? What is it we seek in communion with the Eternal One, in relationship with God? I suggest that what we seek is healing -- not healing as alleviating symptoms of an illness or injury, though that can be part of the healing experience, but healing as living in the awareness of, in synch with, and awake to the reality that we live, move and exist within the life of God. We are completely accepted and loved, completely forgiven and called toward wholeness -- oneness with all creation, with all humanity, and completely motivated to be all we can be -- to work for justice and peace and to practice compassion.

What I want for my life, my dream, is to be in touch with healing to be a source of healing for others through the words I have written and spoken and through my presence and my listening to hold open space in which healing can be embraced. What I want for this church is to live into its potential by embracing healing. I want this congregation to accept the call of the Spirit for this building to be a house of prayer for all people -- "like a healing stream in a barren desert" or "a gentle rain on a thirsty garden" moving "through our lives to coax a new creation." (Bruce Harding, "Like a Healing Stream," 2003) so that those who are hungry for healing will come to find the presence of the Spirit and find it through this community: through our openness to all people, our willingness to ask and encourage challenging questions, and our embracing of differences of thought and perspective -- through hospitality and acceptance -- and in your faces and mine to see the face of Jesus.