

Mark 10:46-52

What Do You Want Me To Do For You?

Trusting that God is present in our struggles

What do you want me to do for you?

It must be an important question as Jesus asked this of James and John in our scripture reading last week and it happens again here in the story of Bartimaeus. Jesus asks, "What do you want me to do for you?"

Most often when I have heard preaching on this passage the focus is on Bartimaeus being blind. He was. That is important. But rather than focus his blindness, let's touch on a few other points in the scriptures.

First let's look at the blindness of those around him.

Now this story is familiar to many, but have you ever pondered that change in the crowd as Bartimaeus called out to Jesus. Here is this very annoying beggar sitting at the side of the road and when he hears that Jesus is near he calls out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

The disciples and those following Jesus through Jericho sternly order Bartimaeus to be quiet. I suspect they would have had a few choice words for him. Scripture is rather mild about how the crowd responded to the nuisance. Many of us have heard or read about crowd behaviour. When people are cruel it incites more cruelty. More bad behaviour. Crowds can be pretty scary when they turn against you. But Bartimaeus is undeterred and cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

How very disruptive and annoying. Can anyone get this guy to shut up?!

But his shouts reach Jesus' ears and Jesus stops the crowd and says, "Call him here."

The crowd has been trying to keep the man from Jesus, but the persistent shout outs have stopped the proceedings. Jesus has heard the shouts and though he is on a mission, headed to Jerusalem, he takes time for a man of no status, no means, and no importance whatsoever.

And that crowd, completely turns around in their behaviour. Their words that were stern and demanding are now compassionate and encouraging. "Take heart; get up, Jesus is calling you."

When I consider how often I and others in the church sound like the people in the crowd it is heartbreaking. The comments spoken here about community members who are just like Bartimaeus on our streets are cruel and unkind. The people may not be blind, but

they have other struggles that hinder their ability to care for themselves. They are homeless, ignored, shouted at. It is very easy to be like the crowd, so much harder to be like Jesus and stop, take the time to pay attention and see the figure in front of us as a person.

So often it comes up in conversation that those who find themselves in such need emotionally, spiritually, socially, and physically, did not start out as children thinking to themselves, “I want to be a homeless addict or alcoholic with mental illness when I grow up.” No one dreams of finding themselves in such a state. Every person you meet that struggles had dreams about being someone of ability and some degree of success.

Think of your own struggles, when you were younger you did not anticipate life with hip replacements, endless trips to appointments, constant aches and pains, or having to really live out your wedding vows of for better or for worse, in richer or poorer, in sickness and in health. Easy to say when you are young and healthy with a life full of promise ahead of you. Another thing when you are watching the person you love transformed by dementia, cancer, tumors, depression, or whatever else you want to add to the list.

Point is, none of us wants to be in a position of vulnerability, and yet that is where most of us spend our time. Still, some like Bartimaeus or the visibly homeless and struggling people on our streets seem to be targeted and we turn our angry and frustrated words upon them. But what if we thought of Jesus in our midst at all times? What if you heard Jesus say, “Call him or her here?” Would we be like the crowd and change our behaviour?

I am not criticizing the crowd. Jesus did not at any point rebuke the crowd for their behaviour. He simply turned his attention to the person in need. He sets an example for how to see a person rather than turning our own blind eye.

Then there is that question, “What do you want me to do for you? You would think it was pretty obvious. Bartimaeus wants to see. He wants to be restored to the community, to his family, whole and able to contribute. Still Jesus wants to hear it from Bartimaeus.

Let’s go back a moment to when the crowd tells Bartimaeus that Jesus wants to speak with him. He threw off his cloak, sprang up, and came to Jesus. All this from a man who could not see. Now his cloak would have been one of his most important possessions. It would be like a security blanket, keeping him warm in the cold, comforting him in his loneliness, and yet he throws it off.

There are two things that come together in Jesus’ question and in the throwing off of the cloak that are important for ourselves. One is, what are we willing to throw off that hampers our reaching out to Jesus, and two, what is our answer to the question, “What do you want me to do for you?”

Scholar Leonard Vander Zee writes in a post,

When Jesus asks, “what do you want from me?” our answer may get at the reality of our faith and discipleship. Are we asking Jesus for a little of this and a little of that to make our lives more comfortable, less burdensome? Or are we asking for something only Jesus can give, the healing of our deepest wounds, our most insidious sins? In asking this question, Jesus points us to the real meaning of discipleship. What are you really after?¹

When we come to worship on a Sunday morning, what are we really after? Is it the comfort of routine? Is it the security of knowing that there is a group of people who look forward to seeing you? An opportunity to catch up with friends? By the way, all good reasons to come to church, but the question remains, what are you really after when it comes to Jesus and worship itself?

Are you looking to become a disciple or to just be comfortable? The answer to this question, “What do you want me to do for you?” is going to be as diverse as each of us are as people.

This passage has been very though provoking for myself, as the security blanket I use is food. It has been a life long struggle. If Jesus were to ask me what do I want him to do for me, my first answer would be to take the struggle with food away and make me healthy and whole in a much smaller body. I have long realized that my struggle is continuous. I have done a lot of healing work, but food continues to be my security blanket.

In other ways when I have cried out to Jesus to take away my anger, my jealousy, my pride, the results have been immediate and striking. And when that happens I give thanks.

When it comes to food, I have not been able to throw off my cloak as Bartimaeus did. But just like the crowd that Jesus did not rebuke, Jesus continues to work in my life, always asking me the question, what do you want me to do for you? If you have any struggles like me then take heart. Your struggle may be pride, gossip, addiction, mental health issues, anger, sloth, the need of power, or the use of laughter and jokes to stop

¹ Vander Zee, Leonard. http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-25b/?type=the_lectionary_gospel
Accessed October 27, 2018.

people from seeing your pain and insecurity, you know what it is. But Jesus asks over and over again, “What do you want me to do for you?”

And with the persistence of Bartimaeus who called out over and over, “Jesus, son of David have mercy on me”, we can trust that Jesus hears, stops, and call for us even when we think our voice is being drowned out by the crowd of voices in our heads and in our lives.

Some of us have to drop our security blankets daily, even moment by moment, to trust Jesus and say what it is that we want Jesus to do for us. Jesus wants to know our answer or he wouldn't have asked the question.

It may be helpful to put this scripture back in to context. Jesus is on the way to the cross. He knows it. He has spoken about it. When Jesus asks, “What do you want me to do for you?” we know already know what he has done. Jesus has gone to the cross for you and I. We cannot even imagine the depth of a love that goes to the cross for us.

When Jesus asks, “What do you want me to do for you”, trust that your answer, your prayer is heard. The challenge for us can be to know how it is answered. Bartimaeus was healed in the moment, and it was said, “Go, your faith has made you well.” We know that healing in this way rarely comes to us today. It may be because we do not have the physical presence of Jesus with us. I don't have the answer for that.

But I have seen enough changes in myself and others to know that God is present in our struggles and hears our cries. Look for the answers, trust that you can give up your cloak, and find wholeness. And may Christ give you the vision, open your eyes, to see and follow Jesus on his way. Amen.