

“What do you Want?” (Mark 10:46-52)

A sermon for the people of Grace UMC – Alamogordo & Tularosa (May 24, 2020)

What are you really and truly looking forward when things get back to normal? Or, if normal never comes back, what are the things that you just can't wait to do? What do you really, truly want as we move with states and cities, business and organizations, and even our own church, “re-opening” in some form or fashion? Which is what we're going to do on Sunday the 14th. So, think about it, what do you really want?

That's a question I asked on Facebook a few weeks ago and I got some amazing and beautiful answers: Many of us are just wanting to do something to get us out of our houses—we want to go shopping, go to the park, go out to eat, Those of us down here in the desert want to go up to Cloudcroft or Ruidoso to shop and eat and enjoy the cool mountains as the heat starts to hit us here. Many of us just want to be able to go to friend's homes or to have people over to our own homes for dinner. So many of you said you missed the simple act of a handshake or a hug, and that you can't wait to do that all again someday. Someone said that they miss “people, places, things... essentially anything that's a noun!” We want movies, coffee shops, and live music back in our lives. Many of us long for the day that our kids be back at school. You want to see your friends and your family at church. You want the after-church lunch and fellowship time. There are so many things that we want, and so many of those things are good and beautiful and true. But, church, in all these wants, have we truly taken a moment to stop ourselves and ask, is this what God really wants me to want. Is this what Jesus is really wanting to do in my life? I believe some of these are, I also know that I don't know everything, and neither do you, and it's such a time as this that we truly and genuinely need to ask ourselves **What does Jesus want me to want?**

There is a powerful question in today's scripture passage, one of the most powerful, perhaps, and it's a question that humbles me each and every time I read it or hear it, it's when Jesus looks at the blind man standing in front of him, blind bar-Timaeus, and asks, **"What do you want me to do for you?" (Mark 10:51)**. *What do you want me to do for you?* Can you imagine Jesus asking you that? Can you imagine the Lord of lords and King of kings standing right in front of you, with all your needs and desires and wants, and saying, *what do you want me to do for you?* It gives me chills to even think about it—that the creator of the cosmos would be concerned with what I—Kelly McCuaig, a sinner, an imperfect and faulty human being—would want. And Jesus wants to stand in front of each of us, you and I alike, all faulty human beings, all messed up people, and ask that same question, *what do you want me to do for you?* But it's easy for us to completely misunderstand this question. Jesus doesn't ask this simply because he wants us to have everything we ever wanted. Jesus doesn't ask us this question. Jesus doesn't even ask us this question because he's concerned, like we are, for everything to get back to normal. There's a very specific reason Jesus asks blind bar-Timaeus this question, and a reason he asks it of us today. And to discover why we need to discover **what Jesus wants us to want**. We need to discover what Jesus wants us to long for and desire.

And to do that we need to go back in the book of Mark just a couple paragraphs. So much of understanding the Bible involves understanding what came just before it. So in your own Bible study and reading, which I hope you're all doing, if you come across something that doesn't quite make sense, or your just not getting the point, take a moment to just go back a chapter or two and read what came before. This won't fix all the challenges we face when reading the Bible, but it will help with a lot of them, and today's passage is just such a passage.

Because as we go back, we discover that Jesus isn't just wanting to grant wishes left and right like Aladdin's Genie, Jesus wants us to want something very specific.

Again, in Mark 10:51 Jesus asked blind Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" And just two paragraphs earlier, in Mark 10:36 Jesus asked his apostles, James and John, the exact same question, **"What is it you want me to do for you?" (Mk 10:36)**. This is no coincidence. This is totally on purpose. God is longing to show us something about our wants and our desires, and to show us what Jesus wants us to want.

Let's start with James and John, what did they want? Well, their request was a simple and understandable one. When Jesus asked them this question of *what do you want me to do for you?* their response was this, **"Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your life, in your glory" (Mark 10:37)**. Pretty arrogant, yes? Pretty selfish and petty, isn't it? But let's not be so quick to judge. In the context of what James and John have experienced, and considering what Jesus said he was doing and who he was, their request isn't so crazy. Yes, it's selfish, yes it's has a tinge of arrogance to it, but consider this: they believed Jesus was the Messiah, and for much of Jewish history, and for the entire lives of both James and John, the understanding was that the Messiah would be a great political and militaristic ruler who would literally re-establish the kingdom of the nation of Israel, and would actually sit on a physical throne in a physical palace in the physical city of Jerusalem. And here they were, James and John, two of his most devoted followers. Who wouldn't want to be in such a place of privilege and honor when you're with the king?! Who wouldn't want to sit next to the Messiah? Think of it like this, when you were a kid and Thanksgiving, and you were relegated to the kids' table, which one of you didn't want to sit with the adult, or better yet, sit with the matriarch or patriarch of your

family? This is foundation of James' and John's desire. They wanted to be close to their king and share in his glory. Are we so different? But Jesus didn't immediately grant their request, he said this, **"You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" (Mk 10:38)**. James and John clearly didn't want what Jesus wanted them to want. He saw their hearts. He saw their hopes. At the end of the day, they just wanted comfort. That's really it. And Jesus is calling them on it, saying that sitting next to him in glory is not a path of comfort, but a path of pain, of sacrifice, and of the cross. What of our wants today? What are some of the things that you're so longing for, and that you're lifting to God in prayer? There's no doubt that many of our wants are good and align beautifully with Jesus, but there's also no doubt in my mind that many of our wants come from the exact same place as James and John... we want them for no other reason than for the simple fact that they're going to make our lives easier, going to make our lives more comfortable. So, what does Jesus want us to want?

For that we jump forward again to today's passage—to blind bar-Timaeus. Now, bar-Timaeus has been cooped up and hunkered down in blindness and poverty for years, decades even, if not the entirety of his life. Don't you think he has wants? Don't you think he has desires? While we've had limited lives for 2 months, bar-Timaeus has had a limited life for all of his life. And there weren't many worse positions to be in 2000 years ago than being blind in the Middle East. He was unclean and he was forbidden from worshiping in the temple. He would never be married. He would never have children. There was no safety net to care for him. All he had, literally, was the care and compassion of the few people who would walk by and throw coins on his cloak that would have been laid out before him. Those coins, those alms and

charity from others, was literally the only comfort he had. For someone like bar-Timaeus, it would have been perfectly normal and understandable to ask for more of that comfort, more of that money, that's what James and John would have done? But bar-Timaeus did something totally unexpected! **"Jesus stood still and said, 'call [bar-Timaeus] here.' And they called the blind man, saying to him, 'Take heart; get up, he is calling you.' So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. 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.' Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has made you well.'"** (Mark 10:49-52a). The surprising thing to the original readers is something that is so easily missed by us, but it's a point that the author made an intentional point to include: "he threw off his cloak"! Most likely this would have been a long, loose garment that would have been flattened out over his crossed legs in order to catch the charitable giving of those passing by, but here, in this moment, the only thing that brought him comfort, the few coins he had, didn't mean anything to him... at all! It's not comfort he wanted. It was the prestige and protection that James and John were asking for when they asked to sit with Jesus on the throne. Bar-Timaeus didn't want life comfort. Bar-Timaeus wanted a transformed and changed life!

Church, in all our desires and wants for the future, for things to get back to normal, or for new wants and desires, **are we following a King who we think can bring us comfort, or are we following a King who we know can change our lives?**

That's exactly what bar-Timaeus wanted, and it couldn't be further from what James and John wanted. Life change is what Jesus wants us to want. And when Jesus asked bar-Timaeus, *what do you want me to do for you?* That's exactly what bar-Timaeus asked for. For

he didn't just go back to being a poor beggar. What did bar-Timaeus do? **"Immediately he regained his sight and follow [Jesus] on the way." (Mark 10:52b)**. In many ways, bar-Timaeus is the most perfect example of what a disciple of Christ is that we have in all of scripture. He longed for life change, he received such a change from Jesus, and then he started to follow Jesus *on the way*... on the way to what? What's the next thing that happens? **"When they were approaching Jerusalem..." (Mark 11:1)**. Remember the very thing that Jesus said James and John didn't truly grasp? They didn't grasp the sacrifice that it would take to follow Jesus. They didn't grasp the purpose of this whole thing. It's because they hadn't asked for life change, only comfort. But bar-Timaeus, upon wanting life-change, and upon asking for it, he immediately started to follow Jesus to Jerusalem, and this would be the last time Jesus would walk into Jerusalem, for in less than a week's time, Jesus would be dying on a cross.

Church, today's challenge is simple. Yes, Jesus does want to do something for you, and he's asking you just that, "What do you want me to do for you?" he says! The question we have to ask ourselves is what we do really want? What does Jesus want us to want? May we be a church and a people who don't want comfort and our personal preferences met as we move forward. May we be a church that desires true, life change, even if it leads us to Jerusalem.

Amen.