

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

October 27, 2024, The 23rd Sunday After Pentecost, The 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Consecration Sunday/Reformation Sunday

Hebrews 7:23-28, Mark 10:46-52

JESUS SAYS: “WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO FOR YOU?”

Well, here it is again, Stewardship Sunday, or Consecration Sunday as we’ve called it for quite a few years around here. Here it is, the Sunday when we name the gifts that we are going to give to our God during the coming year.

And here it is, the “Consecration Sunday sermon,” when you and I both assume we already know what I am going to say:

about stewardship,

about tithing,

about God loving a cheerful giver,

about giving out of our gratitude for all that God has done for us.

End of story, right?

If you’ve heard one Stewardship Sermon, you’ve heard them all, right?

Well, a funny thing happened to me on the way to the sermon this week! It didn’t go where I thought it would go. And probably not where you think it’s going to go.

In fact, the sermon didn’t head down any of the familiar paths that have marked our Consecration Sundays for the past oh-so-many years.

So, I don’t come to you with answers and suggestions this year,

Instead, I come to you with a question.

A question that comes right out of this morning’s gospel lesson.

Because a funny thing happened to me when I read the gospel story for this morning, it had something new to teach me. I was really looking forward to preaching about this story, because it has one of my favorite questions in it. It’s a question I’ve used with youth groups, adult Sunday School Classes, Spirituality Groups, with friends, and in my own faith journey. It is Jesus’ question to Bartimaeus: “What do you want me to do for you?”

Bartimaeus, a man known for being blind, and a beggar, in the town of Jericho cries out to Jesus for mercy. Jesus asks the crowd to bring Bartimaeus to him. Bartimaeus knew, and the crowd knew, that Jesus had been healing people who were blind, deaf and lame. They probably thought they knew what was going to happen. But Jesus did something that was so unexpected that this story of Jesus healing Bartimaeus has been remembered through the years.

It is also told in Matthew and Luke’s gospels, and while the details are a bit different, the surprising reality of the question remains the same.

It’s the question that makes this healing story different from other stories we have about Jesus. Jesus doesn’t look at Bartimaeus, see that he is blind and heal him instantly. Instead, Mark’s gospel tells us that Jesus says to him: “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus waits, until Bartimaeus says: “My teacher, let me see again,” and then Jesus heals him. Jesus waits for Bartimaeus to name the healing he needs in his life.

It’s because of Jesus waiting to hear the answer to his question that I’ve used this story in

Bible studies, youth groups, classes and meditation times, inviting people to listen to Jesus asking them this same question in their present-day lives: “What do you want me to do for you?” And then in prayer, or in journals, or in reflection, I’ve invited people to name the healing that they need in their own lives from Jesus.

And that’s exactly where I thought we were going with this morning’s sermon. I was planning to give you this question as your own, a question from Jesus to you on Consecration Sunday.

I also planned to talk a little bit about the Reformation of the 16th century and its call to rely on God’s grace. Because the 4th Sunday of October is when we as reformed Christians remember Martin Luther nailing his 95 theses, or statements to the door of the Wittenberg church in Germany. I was even going to tell you a bit about being in the Reformer John Knox’s house in Edinburgh, Scotland when I was on Sabbatical. And then in some as yet undetermined manner I was going to tie all that into Consecration Sunday and say Amen!

But then, instead of going down the familiar path I’ve always walked with this question from Jesus, I started to think about the question in a brand-new way.

I’ve spent the last decades years of my life listening to Jesus ask me, and people I’ve taught and served, the question: “What do you want me to do for you?”

This week I started to wonder what would happen if we each asked Jesus this question instead: “Jesus, what do you want me do for you with my life?”

A basic part of Consecration Sunday is talking about how we, as followers of Jesus, are called to be stewards. We are called to be caretakers of what God has put into our lives: our money, our time, our ability to serve others; we are called to be caretakers of the relationships that have been entrusted to us, our spouses and partners, our children and grandchildren, our neighbors, our friends; and we are called to be caretakers of our very lives.

So, what happens when instead of telling Jesus how we are following him and being stewards of our time, money, abilities, family and friends, and our own lives,
we ask Jesus for guidance instead:
“Jesus, what do you want me do for you?”

How do we really know what Jesus wants us to do, unless we ask?
What if the same old answers we’ve always given, and the same old way we’ve always done things, as individuals and as a church needs some reformation, need some change? What if the same old answers for how we’ve lived our lives of faith, are just that...old!?
What if there is a newer way of understanding how Jesus is calling us to follow and serve him that we are missing, because we haven’t asked?

What might happen if we take the risk of asking: “Jesus, what do you want me do for you?”

And then just listen.

Here’s what I believe. If we ask, Jesus will answer.
If we ask, “Jesus, what do you want me do for you?”
and we listen, Jesus will answer.

It seems to me that the story of Jesus with Bartimaeus invites us to ask the question of Jesus without expecting a certain kind of answer, or an answer about a certain part of our lives.

Jesus didn't presume to know what Bartimaeus wanted.

What if we take the risk of not deciding in advance where Jesus can use our lives, but wait to listen instead? What if we don't presume to tell Jesus how to answer us?

What if we don't ask Jesus a specific question like: what do you want me to do for you with my pledge, with my time, with my service to the church; what do you want me to do for you in my family, with my friends, in my faith journey? What if instead of being specific, we let Jesus answer us, as he chooses?

So, we ask: "Jesus, what do you want me do for you in my life?"

And we stop the question there, and take the true and joyful risk of letting Jesus tell us what he wants us to do for him.

Here's what I believe. If we ask, Jesus will answer.

So, this morning I am going to invite all of us stewards gathered here together into a time of silence. And if you are ready to hear the answer, I am going to invite you to begin that time of silence with this question: "Jesus, what do you want me do for you?"

And then we will sit in silence for a few minutes and each listen.

And the answer may come to you immediately,

it may come to you slowly,

it may not come to you this morning, but through circumstances this week, or next week, as you live with the question and the listening

or you may hear an answer later through the voice of someone in your life.

The answer may take time to become clear, or it may be clear to you in the next few minutes. Whether you hear an answer this morning, or later, we can trust that as we enter into this time of silence Jesus is sitting with us.

If we ask, Jesus will answer.

I believe that just as Bartimaeus knew what he needed,

Jesus has a plan for each of us,

a way that we are each specifically called to serve and follow Jesus here in this present time.

If we ask, Jesus will answer.

So now we will enter into a few minutes of silence as each of us asks:

"Jesus, what do you want me do for you?"

"Jesus, what do you want me do for you?"

Let us pray and listen in this silence: