



What Do You Want?

Christopher B. Harbin

Mark 10:46-52

Have you ever stood in front of an open refrigerator while someone asked you what you wanted? Have you ever walked the store aisles and had a salesperson ask what you were seeking? Sometimes it is helpful, at other times we might not really know what it is we want, much less where to find it. Do we really know what we want? Do we really know what it is we should be seeking?

Last Sunday, we looked at a question James and John had for Jesus. It seems in this week's passage Jesus went out of his way to find someone asking a different question. It is as if Jesus were looking for an example of a better request, one the disciples should have been making all along.

Jesus was accustomed to walking with crowds on all sides. There were many people pressing him with concerns, questions, and requests. There was simply no way he could answer them all. They never seemed to stop coming. Consider the five thousand men he had fed on the other side of the lake. They had met him there as he and the Twelve had stolen away to spend time by themselves. How does one respond to the concerns and questions of five thousand men, not to mention the women and children?

In Mark 10, Jesus is simply making his way through the countryside, passing Jericho. That is where Jesus hears one voice in the midst of so many others, crying out for his attention and aid. "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me and help me! Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me and help me!"

The crowd tried to silence him. They did not want to hear Bartimaeus' cries; they wanted to hear anything that Jesus might have to say. Bartimaeus was in the way. He was interfering with the needs and desires of his betters. He was being unruly and was out of order. After all, being blind was a curse; it was seen by most all Jews as divine punishment for sin. He did not deserve Jesus' attention, anyway. Who did he think he was, acting out in such a disorderly manner? Surely he understood his place in society better than that! A blind beggar, living under God's curse, thought he deserved personal audience with Jesus! Why should his interests matter, anyway?

While the crowds tried to shush the blind beggar, Jesus' ears perked up. The crowds might have looked upon him as inferior, but Jesus did not. The crowds looked down upon him for his obvious needs and distress. Jesus forced them to take a different look at one they considered inferior. Calling attention to Bartimaeus, Jesus asked the crowds to usher him forward. Imagine their surprise, when one they treat as inferior is brought by Jesus to the head of the line! Is he one of those we would treat as inferior?

Perhaps it should be more surprising that Bartimaeus has not given up and kept quiet. After all, the crowds had tried to silence him, but he just yelled all the louder. He had gotten the message from so many that he was undeserving. He had heard repeatedly that he lived under God's curse and displeasure. He had felt the brunt of continued mistreatment with the ever present explanations that it was simply what he deserved. Even so, he had not given up on God taking an interest in him. When Jesus passed through, he was willing to take the chance that God did care for him, after all. He was unwilling to accept the lie, but chose to face the odds to risk discovering whether God had mercy for a simple blind beggar with so little to offer, so little for which to live. In his circumstances, would we consider God having an interest in us?

Bartimaeus cried out in faith, a confidence he probably did not always feel. His were cries out of deep desperation. They were words of conviction, yet also words of a sagging, desperate hope. If Jesus

did nothing for him, there was nothing left for him. He would simply have to continue his life of meager subsistence and accept the barrage of insults, thrown at him in words and by the inattention of the crowds. Then Jesus called him forward!

The crowd's attitudes toward Bartimaeus suddenly began to shift. No, they were not miraculously changed in a word from Jesus. They were filled with awe, wonder, curiosity, and likely some anger thrown in the mix. What could Jesus possibly want with this no-account, blind beggar? Would he become some object lesson? Would Jesus come down on him for disturbing the crowds and causing a commotion above which Jesus' words could not be heard? Did Jesus really have some interest in this man who was by all accounts cursed by God with blindness?

Bartimaeus was ready at a word to get to Jesus. He jumped to his feet and threw off his cloak to be led to Jesus' presence. He arrived trembling with excitement, fear, anticipation, and anxiety. Then Jesus spoke to him. "So, what do you want me to do for you?"

Say what? Was Jesus the only one in the whole crowd who did not know what he wanted? Sure, he had no white cane or seeing-eye-dog, but they all knew he was blind. "What do you want?" "My teacher," he replied, "Let me see again!"

That's the same question Jesus had asked James and John. The response was wholly different, however. Instead of asking for power, position, or authority, Bartimaeus asked for sight, for vision. He asked that his sight be restored.

It's what the disciples should have asked Jesus, but didn't. It's what the crowds needed to seek, but didn't. They were too wrapped up in the security of their attitudes towards others like this blind man. They could not even look upon him in grace and mercy as he requested Jesus to do. Only when he recovered his sight, did their attitudes toward him really begin to change. They started shifting, because Jesus demonstrated a different attitude, one of grace and mercy to all.

Bartimaeus' words reflected no uncertainty as to what he wanted from Jesus. He wanted sight. He wanted vision. He wanted his life to be restored. He wanted to be part of the community of Israel once again. He wanted God's mercy and grace to meet him at his need and restore him to full living.

Jesus used their dialogue differently. Sure, Jesus healed his eyes. Jesus restored his sight and his place within the community. Jesus did more than that, however. He directed Bartimaeus' answer toward the disciples and the discussion they had just been having. "If you want to be great in God's reign, you must be the servant of all." Rather than ask for the power sought by the world, rather than jostle for position and pecking order as the crowd; rather than seek to make yourselves great, cast yourselves on God's mercy that you might see reality as God.

Bartimaeus' answer did not reflect all of that on his own, but in the context of Jesus' teaching, his words pointed to so much more. Toward whom would God change our attitudes? Do our requests reflect God's priorities?

What is it we really want? In all of our uncertainty and failing vision, we need to be asking different questions. What is it that God wants to do in our lives? Isn't it time we begin seeking God's vision and perspective for living? Bartimaeus cast off his limited possessions, his cloak; then he began to follow Jesus without turning back for it. Open our eyes, Lord, that we might see others even as you see them. Restore our sight that we might become great servants of your reign, changed in our attitudes and desires. Help us become what you desire, Lord!

*_*_*