



What do you really want?

Homily by Lisa Wiens Heinsohn given for the people of St. John's Episcopal Church

October 28, 2018; Mark 10:46-52

When I was in training to become a spiritual director I had a teacher named Matt Linn, who is a Jesuit priest that has devoted his vocation to writing and teaching and giving retreats about healing. He's steeped in the spirituality of the Jesuit founder, St Ignatius of Loyola. St Ignatius believed that individuals and communities could discern the will of God by getting in touch with our deepest desires over time. St Ignatius had had a life changing, one might say mystical experience where he saw that everything in all creation was good, and made by God, infused with God's goodness, and so he believed that the closer you could get to your essence, the closer you got to God. So my teacher Matt Linn taught us this when he was teaching spiritual direction. I'll never forget one session when he and I were practicing spiritual direction together. I was telling him something about what I was confused about, and he just leaned over, and looked at me with these eyes that had such depth and compassion in them, and he asked me: What do you really want? The question pierced me. I don't know if I'd really ever thought about it.

In today's gospel reading Jesus asks the blind man, Bartimaeus, nearly the same question. What do you want me to do for you? Bartimaeus had already been yelling and creating a disruption. He was yelling and saying "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." The gospel reading describes him as a blind beggar. So we can imagine why he wanted mercy, compassion. Did you know that the word "Bartimaeus" is literally the Hebrew for "Son of Timaeus"? In

other words this man doesn't have his own name. He is just someone's son. And the name Timaeus means defilement, unclean, impure. In that culture whatever was unclean was separated from society and treated with disgust and contempt. So the Son of Defilement, who had no other name, who had no identity, who was invisible to the culture around him, was crying out with all his might for compassion. He was crying out to Jesus, the Son of David. The name Jesus means "God saves," or "God heals". The name David means Beloved. So the Son of Defilement was calling out to the Son of the Beloved, have some compassion.

And Jesus calls him over. And I love what happens next. Jesus asks him, What do you want me to do for you? It's exactly the same question he asked the disciples James and John earlier in the same chapter in Mark's gospel, when James and John ask to sit at Jesus' right and left hand in his glory. What do you really want? And this man who was invisible to others, who had no identity, could have asked, I want to be treated well. I want to be seen by the people around me without contempt. I want a place where I can live and be cared for so I don't have to stay by the roadside and beg anymore. But this man who was invisible to others asks, I want to see. He calls Jesus Rabbouni, My Teacher. And he regains his sight, and what he does is to follow Jesus after that. Jesus says, your faith has made you well. In Greek it says your faith has saved you, your faith has healed you.

In our culture, the language of wanting is generally connected to consumerism, the marketplace, the extreme individualism of our culture which has lost all notion of what community truly is. But Bartimaeus asked for a personal healing that would connect him with others, that would restore him fully to being capable of being in relationship with those around him, to be able to give as well as to receive, to have dignity. He asked to be made whole. If I were to ask each of you, what do you really want? I suspect that

we would not ask for nearly enough. The name Jesus means God heals. God saves. Many of us are squeamish about the word salvation because we were taught it meant one thing, which is to avoid hell when you die. But nothing could be further from what saving looks like in the gospels. Saving looks like Jesus meeting people where they are, and giving them what they in their uniqueness need to be made whole. And this saving, this healing, is worth everything, and turns your life around. Jesus does not shame people into doing their best. He loves them and affirms their goodness and heals them. And the saving, even though it is so individual, is always for the sake of connecting people back to community.

Wednesday night a number of us were at Liberty Church in North Minneapolis, listening to Pastor Alika Galloway talk about her vision for the Healing Space, which is a place for people who have suffered from sex trafficking and survival sex to come and heal. She shared that the reason she was doing this is the story of so many in her own family. She shared that her grandmother had wanted to buy her own burial site ahead of time so that her daughter, Alika's mother, would not have such a financial burden. But there was no way for her to afford it. So she gave the owner of the cemetery what he wanted, over and over again, until he finally gave her the deed to the gravesite. The same thing happened in many different ways to four or five others in Pastor Alika's family. Pastor Alika knew and loved people who had been treated with violence and contempt and so she is seeking to create a haven for others to heal from that violence. What she said is that when anyone suffers from sexual violence, she suffers from it. Yesterday the Justice & Service committee met to discuss their vision and mission, and the focus of their conversation was the following quote: "If you are just coming to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you're coming because your liberation is bound up in mine, let us walk together." Pastor Alika is operating from

that place. The place that recognizes that no one can be liberated unless all of us can be liberated.

We all have our wounds, those places in us that we think can't be made whole. But we haven't asked, we haven't prayed for nearly enough, for ourselves or for those in our community and in our neighborhoods and world who are suffering. We could stand to regain a faith in the possibility of "salvation", in God's will for healing and wholeness for all, God's will for Beloved Community that invites each of us to have a name and an identity and unique gifts to offer the world. This is true for the trans person who does exist as a beloved child and creation of God, even if some refuse to see them. This is true for the person suffering from chronic homelessness or mental illness or alcoholism, who has a name and an identity and a goodness deeper and more real than any illness that they may have. This is true for every one of us in the ways we've been hurt and in the ways we've hurt others. This faith in a God who heals, a God who saves, and a God who is seeking to make everyone whole, is worth everything that we are and have. This is what we mean when we talk about following the way of Jesus, because this is what Jesus taught and modeled and what Jesus makes possible for us.

And the way we live into Jesus' way is to practice. We are a practicing community because we never get this stuff perfectly. We're learning and making mistakes and growing together, me right along with the rest of you. The seven practices of the way of Jesus are Turn, Learn, Pray, Worship, Bless, Go, Rest.¹ Today, and this week, I'd like to invite each of us to focus on the practice of prayer. In prayer we seek to be daily in connection with God. In prayer we seek to regain a sense of the presence and radical love of God, and our own created goodness. And in prayer we also seek to answer

¹ <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/way-of-love-materials>

the question, what do you really want? And to ask God for the radical healing and wholeness, for ourselves and those around us, that is the will of God.

So this week, whatever situation in your own or someone else's or the nation's life is most troubling to you, I invite you to pray. To name what it is that you really want, to God, and with each other. This will lead you to other practices, because we were never meant to only pray. We might be invited to turn, to turn from attitudes or actions that are not life-giving, that do not serve us or others well anymore. We might be invited to learn, to study the scriptures and others in the tradition and in the world who have walked this road before us and who have helpful things to teach us. We might be invited to bless, to offer the best of what we are and have to the situation that troubles us, to offer our resources and our hands and words. And we will be invited to rest, to trust in God's presence and power for healing and life for us and for the world God so loves.