

What do you want me to do for you?

Mark 10:46-52

August 23, 2015

Something that David and I often argue about -- that got your attention, right? hmmm.... what DO married pastors argue about? -- something we disagree on is: when is the proper time to show up at somebody's house for dinner.

I mean, when we've been **invited** for dinner -- don't worry, we don't make a habit of just showing up.

When we've been invited to someone's house for dinner, especially if it might be a largish gathering, when ought one to actually turn up? David's usual practice, until I came into the picture and made him stop, was to show up just a little bit *early*, ten minutes or so, the thought being that that's a nice time to chat with your host, before everyone else gets there.

I made him stop because I know what *I'm* like ten minutes before dinner guests show up.

If there's a dinner party at our house, inevitably, always, I will have grossly underestimated how long anything will take to get done. Hence, ten minutes before people arrive, I am still in a torn t-shirt, frantically counting clean forks, while simultaneously tearing open a box of frozen Trader Joe appetizers with my teeth.... all the time hollering at David to please find a clean tablecloth because there has to be one somewhere.

It's not pretty.

I'd like to say that it all comes together before people arrive, but that would not be true.

Though, never, I will say, quite as bad as the evening at my brother and sister-in-law's house, when they invited 17 people for a 6:00 dinner, but remembered it as 16 people for a 7:00 dinner.

Imagine their surprise when the doorbell rang at 6.
So it's never been that bad at our house, but it's been hairy.

Which is why I am always grateful, nigh unto tears, for those guests who walk into the kitchen and say, simply, "What do you need me to do?"

"What do you want me to take care of for you?"

Essie Morgan -- is she here today? -- Essie, I don't know if you remember this, but Essie, at one such dinner, walked into the kitchen, said "What do you need me to do?"

and when the answer was "do you know how to cook chicken marsala?"
she didn't blink.

She just made chicken marsala. [I am forever grateful, Essie]

How wonderful those words are, truly:

What do you need me to do?

What do you want help with?

What can I do for you?

You may wonder how I plan to jump from chicken marsala to Jesus.

That is what I'm going to do.

Because I can never read this story, the one Leonard that just shared about blind Bartimaeus,

I can never read it without picturing Jesus as that person who walks into the mess and says simply "what do you need doing?" ...

the person who just wants to get you out of your jam.

In truth, that's exactly who Jesus **is** in this story. That person.

The one who just wants to know what you need,
so he can jump right in and take care of it.

I have always loved this little story; I preached one of my very first sermons on it, way back when.

It says, to me it says, pretty much everything you need to know
about who Jesus was for people, who Jesus **is** for people.

The story takes place, as Leonard said, near the end of Jesus' life. Jesus and his followers are walking to Jerusalem, and you have to believe that there was a certain heaviness to that for Jesus -- he knew what lay ahead for him, even if none of his friends grasped that yet. So, it would be understandable if he was preoccupied, it would be excusable if maybe he didn't have time to deal with people, and their needs and their demands on him. But that wouldn't be Jesus, would it. Instead, as they're passing through the town of Jericho, Jesus hears someone calling out to him, *Jesus, Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me.* And Jesus turns and looks, past all the folks crowded around him, he turns and looks, and he sees a blind man, a beggar, sitting by the side of the road, calling out to him. And everyone around the beggar is telling him to be quiet, *don't bother Jesus, hush, shut up.* But Bartimaeus, that beggar, cries out again, and Jesus tells the crowd they don't need to shush him, and he says come on up here, friend. And Bartimaeus makes his way up to Jesus, slowly, cautiously, unseeing, and when he gets to Jesus, Jesus asks him this question. Jesus says to him "What do you want me to do for you?"

I talked about the relief of a kind soul stepping into *my* mess and saying "what do you need me to do?"

Times that by a zillion, and you get some sense of what it must have felt like for Bartimaeus in that moment, as not just *any* kind soul but the Messiah himself, the great healer, asks him with such kindness: "What do you want me to do for you?"

And without hesitation, with utter confidence in what Jesus can do, with boldness, and yes, greatest faith, Bartimaeus says simply:

Let me see again.

And Jesus heals him. Jesus heals him.

Folks have sometimes wondered *why* does Jesus ask Bartimaeus what he needs.

I mean, there's a man who can't see standing in front of him.

Isn't it kind of obvious what he needs?

Isn't this, frankly, kind of a silly question, like asking someone with a cast on, "hey, did you do something to your arm?"

Why ask the blind beggar,

What do you want me to do for you?

It's not a silly question.

Jesus asks Bartimaeus that question because asking that question is what Jesus does, not just for Bartimaeus but for everyone, for you, for me.

It is perhaps **the** question of the Gospel, perhaps the most important question.

Jesus stands in front of each one of *us* and asks *us* this:

What do you want me to do for you?

What do you need from me?

I'll tell you the truth, I don't think we're used to that idea.

The idea that Jesus is asking each one of us, right now, "what do you want me to do for you?"

What we want Jesus to do for us?

Isn't it what we can do for Jesus?

That's what I'm usually up here talking about, right? ... what *we* can be doing *for Jesus*. We talk here about being Christ's hands and feet and heart in this world, about carrying out his mission.

We talk about seeing him in our brothers and sisters in need; *may we see the face of Christ in everyone we meet*, we say.

We are here to learn how to serve him,

how to love him, how to be his presence, his body.

and we pray here to him to show us what it is he's calling us to do for him.

As we should, as we should. We're his followers.

But wait, says Bartimaeus.

Listen, says Bartimaeus.

Before all of that: Christ has one question for you.

What do you want me to do for you?

*What do you want me to do **for** you?*

What do you want Christ to do for you?

What help do you need?

What healing do you need?

What in you needs to be restored?

What do you long for?

Maybe it's forgiveness. Maybe there's something you've done, or something you wish desperately you **had** done, and you're carrying that sorrow and that guilt around.

Maybe that's what you want Christ to do for you -- to help that weight slide off your shoulders.

Maybe it's peace you need?

Maybe there's turmoil within you that you can't seem to calm on your own; maybe there's worry that makes it hard to sleep at night.

Maybe giving you **peace** is what you want Christ to do for you -- calm the waters of your spirit.

What do you want me to do for you? he asks.

Maybe it's hope. A daily dose of newspaper reading can wear you down quick these days;

maybe you need the antidote, God's antidote:

a reminder that love is around and within us, always,

that God's fingerprints can be found everywhere in this fragile world.

Maybe invigorating your **hope** is what you most want Christ to do for you.

Maybe it's faith. That simple and that hard.
Maybe when Christ asks "what do you want me to do for you,"
the answer is "I believe ... but help my unbelief, Lord."

And maybe what you want him to do for you, what you need him to do,
is something big, really big.

Two years ago now, a former NBA player named Chris Herren came and spoke here,
down at Ludlowe Middle School one evening.

You may remember the name -- Chris Herren grew up in Massachusetts,
was a standout at Boston College, then played for the Celtics.

But all along was battling an ever-increasing addiction, first to painkillers, and then
worse and worse.

There was one Celtics game where he missed the moment the starting line-up was
called because he was out in the parking lot buying heroin.

The Celtics let him go ...

and this most promising of athletes eventually one night overdosed on heroin,
crashed his car into a utility pole.

Taken off to rehab, Chris was told by a staffer that his family would have been better
off

if he'd died in the crash.

And **that** was the moment, when, he said,
he got down on his knees, literally fell on his knees.

And it was time -- it was past time -- for Chris to say it.

It was time, past time, for him to say "Help me see things right again.

Heal me."

Chris Herren goes everywhere now, talking about it --
just as he did for the teens in our town, he talks to teens all over the place --
he begs them not to follow his road,
and for those who already have, he lets them know that there is help for the asking.

What do **you** want Christ to do for you?

What deep desire for healing within you aches for his touch?

What would you ask for from him?

It's *hard* to ask, it really is.
It requires an admission of need that does not come easy to us.
What do you want me to do for you? Christ asks,
and we in return are likely to say "You know what, I'm okay ..."
We who hate to be needy,
worry about being weak,
shy away from vulnerability and dependence
we are just as likely to say "Thanks, I got it! I'm good!"

But we aren't.
We don't "got it" all the time,
and we are not always "good," far from it.
There's not a one of us who doesn't have something
that we need his help with.
Not a one of us has it all together,
not a one of us isn't hurting somewhere,
needing something.

So I'm going to give you homework today,
I guess you'd call it prayer homework.

I want you to find a quiet place sometime today or tomorrow,
and I want you to give yourself even just five minutes alone with Christ.
I want you to picture him,
standing in front of you,
saying this to you: "what do you want me to do for you?"
Hear him say your name.

Then, from down in your soul, let the truest answer emerge,
born of deepest need and heart's desire.

Say to him, "What I most want from you right now is this"
Say it out loud:
"What I most want from you right now is this, Lord."

And that way lies healing.
Bartimaeus could tell you that.
That way lies our healing.
Amen.