



‘What do you want me to do for you?’

When Jesus speaks in the gospels, he often makes statements. “I am the light of the world.” “Be not afraid.” “Love your enemies.”

Sometimes, though, Jesus asks questions. “Why are you weeping?” “What is truth?” Someone took the time to count Jesus’ questions and came up with 307; I have no reason to doubt that number.

Of Jesus’ many questions, my favorite is the one he asks Bartimaeus. Bart is blind and is also a beggar; despite the din of the Jericho crowd that has gathered around Jesus, despite the stern shushing and finger wagging of those trying to silence him, Bart manages to get Jesus’ attention. “Have mercy on me,” he cries out.

Jesus stops, turns in Bart’s direction, and then asks “What do you want me to do for you?” Is the man’s need not obvious? Clearly he’s blind and living on the economic edge. Jesus assumes nothing, asking Bartimaeus what he wants Jesus to do. And then Jesus waits for the man to answer.



Pastor’s Perspective

By Rev. Karen Winkel

Years ago I volunteered at a Navajo Nation mission church. It was my job to go to the Post Office to pick up the boxes of clothing that had been shipped from all over the country, bring them back to the church, and then work with several locals to organize the donations.

Rather than ask the Navajo what they wanted and needed, donors made assumptions—and so sent along cloth bathing suits from the 1950s, cocktail dresses from the 1960s, leisure suits from the 1970s, and clothing so tattered and stained it went straight to the landfill.

Had anyone bothered to ask, the Navajo would have

quickly said they could use Wranglers and work boots, western shirts and new socks, attire from the same decade everyone else inhabited, durable clothing for a demanding high desert climate.

To ask anyone what they want or need, rather than assume we know, is one way to convey respect—and to people of all situations and sizes. A friend taught her baby simple sign language so that he could communicate his wants and needs; as soon as he was able to use his hands to sign “more milk” or “want toy,” this already happy baby grew happier still.

When I asked a middle-aged parishioner what she needed while her husband underwent a complicated surgery, it was evident she wasn’t used to having people wonder what she needed. Instead, she was accustomed to being told. It took some doing to assure her that whatever her answer, it was valid. Once she was able to say what she wanted and didn’t have to offer a justification, once her request

was met with not with questions but with caring, the weight on her shoulders lifted and the light returned to her eyes. Being asked “what do you need” opened the door to a series of healing changes in that woman’s life.

What did the blind beggar Bartimaeus want from Jesus? Jesus did not presume to know. Instead he asked the man to tell him — perhaps Bart had a friend struggling even more than he was or a family member on her sick bed, perhaps Bart had an affliction greater than blindness. Jesus assumed nothing and held space for Bart to speak for himself.

Bartimaeus’ vision was restored but to my mind that was only half the healing he deserved. He had his dignity restored as well — and in this, a hundred new possibilities arose. What possibilities might open up around us if we, like Jesus, asked how we might help rather than assumed we already knew? Let’s find out!

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