

Augusta First Baptist Church
Matthew 20:29-34
What Do You Want Me to do For You?
February 18, 2007
When God Asks the Questions series

29 *“As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. 30 There were two blind men sitting by the roadside. When they heard that Jesus was passing by, they shouted, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!” 31 The crowd sternly ordered them to be quiet; but they shouted even more loudly, “Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!” 32 Jesus stood still and called them, saying, “What do you want me to do for you?” 33 They said to him, “Lord, let our eyes be opened.” 34 Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they regained their sight and followed him.”*

Since the beginning of 2007, I have shared with you a series of sermons entitled, “When God Asks the Questions.” And so we have encountered in both the Old and New Testaments the direct inquiries of God to men and women. Today we come to one of the more familiar miracles of Jesus: restoring sight to the blind. In the gospels, there are ten references to Jesus healing the blind. Most of the stories are pretty direct. Someone is blind, they are brought before Jesus and he heals them. So what makes this particular story unique, different, or worth pondering?

It’s the question: “What do you want me to do for you?” This question is the most frequently asked question of Jesus in all the gospels.

For some reason, Jesus does not take it for granted that everybody he encounters wants to be healed. Take the story of the man who was lame and sat by the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-15). Jesus approaches this man whom the Bible tells us has sat by this pool, lame for 38 years and he asks him, “Do you want to be made well?” Don’t you find that question just a little bit odd? Who wouldn’t want to be made well when you have been sick for so long. Four decades is a long time to be an invalid.

To me these questions seem superfluous, don’t you think? Of course, a blind man wants to see and of course the lame want to walk. Yet Sunday after Sunday we come here – you and me – limping about, stumbling in our darkness, and wounded to the core. We have walked with our wounds for so long we don’t really notice them anymore, grief, anger, disillusionment and rejection. In the context of worship, Jesus asks this old familiar question yet again: *what do you want me to do for you?*

Jesus has to ask the question, you know. It is possible that we can get so wrapped up in our wounds that we just cannot see another alternative. Just yesterday I saw this illustrated in a most humorous way. We had parked a mini-bike down at the mailbox with a “For Sale” sign perched on top. A construction worker took interest, gave me a call and made an offer. Before completing the transaction, however, he had to take the mini-bike out for a spin. I cranked it for him, gave him a brief demonstration explaining, I thought clearly enough, how the throttle worked and where the brake was located. With that he plopped on the bike, gunned the throttle and took off. Immediately he lost control, the bike careened between a couple of parked cars before plunging about eight feet or so straight down in a ditch. I saw the rider tumble head over heels with the bike somersaulting in front of him. One of the construction workers standing beside me said, “Yeah, he just bought that bike didn’t he?”

Why didn’t he let go? Well, I have done the same thing in the past on motorcycles and four-wheelers and even horses. When I was about ten years old, my father had just bought another horse for us to ride. This mix-breed horse was as mean as scratch. The first time I saddled up to ride, she bolted across the pasture and took me beneath every low lying limb. I was convinced she was out to kill me. She was vicious, I tell you, and I

am not sure how or when I got off, but clearly like that construction worker on the mini-bike, I was out of control. By the way, the horse's name was "Princess."

Pride and fear often paralyzes us in such a way that we are careening through life out of control.

Jesus' question is not so curious. These blind men before Jesus are two men whose lives are out of control.

They are blind and in Jesus' day being blind meant destitution. Unless you had family to care for you, your only resort for survival was to beg. There was no welfare system, no social organization, no charitable institution. Like aliens, widows and orphans, they had **no value**. This is probably why the crowd tried to hush them when they called out to Jesus. *31 The crowd sternly ordered them to be quiet; but they shouted even more loudly, "Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!"*

Do you know anybody like that, whom society has in one way or another said, "You have no value?" Is it the Hispanic, here illegally but trying to provide for his family? Is it the mentally disabled, who because of their lack of social skills, no one wants to be around? Do you know of someone who, quite frankly, has no value in this culture? Sure. We all do.

The crowd wants those without value to hush up and disappear, stop being a distraction, stop being a nuisance. We want control! But Jesus notices, hears and stands still and he asks them *the question* – "What do you want me to do for you?"

This question reminds me of a similar question Jesus asked some wannabe followers in John 1:38 – "What are you looking for?" Maybe that is what worship is all about, facing the questions of God. *Do you want to be well? What do you want me to do for you? What are you looking for?* These are the probing, penetrating questions to people whose lives are out of control and they are too blind to see it.

If Jesus were to ask you that question today, how would you answer? Would you know how to answer? I wonder if we really know what we want or what we are looking for.

Could that be why we endlessly narcoticize ourselves with "things?" We clear out our closets for more clothes and shoes, we buy more books, download more tunes, look for the latest electronic gadget, and shop for a new car because we are bored with our old one.

You have heard me share before that my family stays frustrated buying me presents, and the truth is I am not sure what I want. Are any of you like that? Perhaps the real problem that we have in answering the question is that we are afraid to tell others what we really want. When my family asks me what I want for Christmas or Father's Day or my birthday I tell them that I want a cabin in Dahlonega, right by a creek. I want a Ford 8-N tractor to plow and plant a vegetable garden. That is what I want, but I know that is not what they are going to get me.

This question is of course not so much about things but life. It forces us to think seriously about what it is we really want, really need, and what it is that is really important to us.

But back to the question of Jesus: *What do you want me to do for you?* How would you answer? Would we give the standard beauty contestant answer of the eradication of hunger and the emergence of world peace? Nah, probably too broad, too vague and certainly not personal enough.

*What do **you** want **me** to do for **you**?* We know from Matthew's account that these men were believers. That is they address him as Lord, Son of David. Those responsible for good theology should chime in from the

crowd and hush the blind men and say: *your faith in God should be enough; be content!* But they are not silenced, for even with right and proper faith they hunger, they hurt, and they need.

So who can blame them for asking? And now Jesus reverses the question: *What do you want me to do for you?*

Let me take a stab at some of the things we want in life:

We want security and peace. In the end we want to know everything is going to be all right. I have never lived in a time where I did not feel secure. Even with September 11 fresh in everyone's memory, I still feel fairly secure. Of course, most of the world doesn't live this way. Ask an Iraqi, or a Palestinian, or Israeli, or spend some time in Darfur. Still, we all hunger for things to be right because we know what anxiety is like and we don't like it.

We want meaning. (does what we do really matter or count for something?) 40 Days of Purpose...

We want healing. Yet Jesus doesn't take away all our pain. For every lame man by the pool of Bethesda given the power to walk again, hundreds more crawl on. For every blind man given sight, thousands more grope in darkness. For every child raised from the dead, the air is still thick with another mother's grief. Isaiah tells us that by his stripes we are healed, but even in the healing there is pain yet to bear. No, let's be honest here. Jesus cannot take away all our pain. But Jesus can accompany us through our pains and our wounds.

The blind men want to see. That is what they want. No big surprise. It should be no great surprise that is the same thing we want, deep down. I know we often masquerade our wants with things like power, affluence, self-assurance and the like.

Deep down, however, what we want is the same thing God wants for us: we want to see. **We want a vision of what could be.** Ask any father that is worth bearing that title what they want for their children: they want the best. And most parents see things in their children that others do not. Have you ever held a conversation with a parent – and it really doesn't matter how old the child is – and the parent says things about their child that you just do not see? Things like how smart they are, talented, gifted, etc. You and I may think to ourselves, *hmmm*, your son (or daughter) is dumb as a sack of rocks, or lazy or whatever. It is not as simple as saying that parent is wearing blinders. It is just that most parents can see things in their children that others cannot; oftentimes seeing things that the child does not see.

And I believe that is just how God is with us. God has a vision for our lives for us to grow into. We are not so far removed from the blind men in today's story. *Lord let our eyes be opened.*

God sees things in you and me that we are at this point we just do not see. God sees in us the possibility, potential and promise.

God sees things in his children that we just don't always get. We see fear, failure, and pride and so our lives careen ever onward out of control. But God sees so much more: God sees the possibility, promise, and potential, and God sees purpose.

What do you want me to do for you? Lord, let our eyes be opened!

The funny thing is, it is what God wants for us too – don't you see? God wants you and I to have a fresh vision for this life.

This is not a message for all of us to feel warm and cozy and embrace Maslow's hierarch of needs as our own. No, no. The last line is perhaps the most important. *Immediately they regained their sight and **followed** him.*

Live into the vision Christ has for you and may God find us faithful in following Him all our days.

Wendell Berry has written that "To treat life as less than a miracle is to give up on it."