

What would you ask Jesus?

Job 42:1-6, 10-17; Mark 10:46-52

On the bus the other day, I listened to an artful child talking to her mother. “Look, mummy, the Halloween decorations are up. That must mean it’s time for me to start writing my Christmas list for Santa. What **do** I want this year?” Joy was unconfined when a few stops later the same child noticed that another shop had its Christmas decorations up.

One of the challenges in life, at whatever age, is discerning between what we want and what we need. So much of what we want and what we need is not simply demand by our desire, but is also dependent on what others are able to provide.

Nor is our asking simply about what we might like for Christmas, or what we might want for Sunday lunch, or what kind of coffee we might order in a shop. Some of what we want, or even need, is much more fundamental.

I know it sounds a bit ‘Spice Girls’, but what do you want; what do you really, really want?

For the coming winter not to be too hard?

To win the lottery?

For the nuclear arms race **not** to restart?

For Brexit not to happen?

For Brexit to happen?

For Church funds to improve?

For more young people in Church?

For more people in Church?

For a relationship to improve?

For a pending medical test to have good results?

For a better job to come your way?

For a child to be happy?

For aches and pains to go away?

For a sense of hope?

For a holiday?

For your voice to be heard in a dispute?

For something to be left on the Jam and Baking stall when you get through to the St Matthew Hall for coffee after the service?

For the Minister to stop asking all of these questions?

What is it that you want? The question a concerned parent asks a fractious child. The question a wife asks her struggling-to-communicate husband who has dementia. The question that Jesus asked blind Bartimaeus on the roadside outside Jericho.

There was a large crowd of people jostling around Jesus, pressing to get nearer, wanting a bit of the action, wanting to be associated with the celebrity passing through their town. But there was one man on the outside. I suspect Bartimaeus would have sat at the roadside every day, begging from travellers as they passed by. Imagine his confusion when the crowd turned up, pushing and shoving him out of the way. He was in danger of being trampled underfoot. Largely unnoticed, or cursed for getting in the way. The blind man is not prepared to be pushed aside and ignored; he perseveres, and he works out Who it is that is passing by: Jesus, the miracle worker.

The poor man, in his eagerness to follow Jesus, throws off the cloak he spread every out every day to catch the coins he begged, his only means of livelihood. It's a powerful statement we might miss. For this blind man, his cloak was his protection his working clothes, his fashion statement, his bank, his security blank. But he throws it away, because he wants something else, he needs something else.

When Jesus asks Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" Bartimaeus isn't only asking to see again, he is asking to be seen. The blind man, who cannot see, is also asking that others might see him. He wants to be noticed. He wants to be heard. He wants to be understood. He wants to be accepted.

Travelling widely last year, I was struck by how often it was important to pay attention to the people I met. Yes, sometimes to ask them what they wanted or needed. But even before that, simply to see them, and to hear them. Famous people, ordinary people. But people, needing to be seen, needing to be heard, needing to be understood, needing to be accepted, needing to be noticed.

A man in a church café, faithfully providing lunches for people in the community, never coming out of the kitchen, but really needing to be noticed.

A Pope, with the weight of a huge institution resting on his shoulders, not only needing to be prayed for, but to be asked, 'How are you', and so having his humanity recognised.

An infant, whose mother was receiving counselling for post natal depression, crawling on his own on the floor, crying until someone helped him play with his toys, needing to be noticed.

A homeless person from Africa, freezing after a night on the streets of Glasgow, not having spoken to a soul for days, needing someone to notice that he'd like milk in his tea, but too afraid to ask, until someone noticed.

A Prime Minister, embattled on all sides, not sure who were friends and who were foes, again simply needing to be asked, 'How are you?'

A lifeboat captain, not sure about the meaning of life, but saving lives each time his lifeboat was called out, needing to be heard when he asked, "Is there really a God when there's so much suffering?"

A young man in Bethlehem with learning difficulties, hidden away from the world but making beautiful olive wood gifts, delighted to be heard when he said, "I am the boy who makes the stars."

A Jewish mother and a Palestinian father, children killed in the ongoing violence in Israel Palestine, wanting their stories of pain and hurt to be heard in a world that sometimes thinks more violence is the only answer.

An Afghani teenage immigrant in Stockholm, no family, no friends, noticed at last by a older church woman and given not only food and shelter but a home.

A lady in her 90s in a nursing home, feeling unwanted at her age, but delighted that someone came to visit her and listen to her stories.

What do you want? What do you need? What would you ask Jesus to do for you, or to be for you? Does it not always start first with being noticed, and with being heard?

I have heard that there is a bronze statue somewhere in the heart of Texas depicting this scene between Jesus and Bartimaeus. The blind man is crouching, starting to spring up, one hand extending towards Jesus, the other holding his cane and cape, ready to drop them in the dust. The statue captures so much of this story: it is as much about discipleship as about healing, as much about following as about seeing.¹

In Mark's Gospel, Bartimaeus is the last person to be healed by Jesus, Who afterwards enters Jerusalem on His journey towards the cross. Bartimaeus is also the only person in Mark's Gospel who is not only healed, but also named. Others are identified by their illness or infirmity, or their location or their gender, but this man, this Bartimaeus, is named. He is heard. He is seen. And it is maybe this, amongst all the other things in this story, that we are meant to notice. Jesus asks Bartimaeus what he wants, because Jesus is drawing attention to the fact that He has noticed this man on the edge of life, and gives him what he wants and what he needs, and brings him into the centre of things.

There are many people, maybe some here in Church today, maybe not the ones you might think, who also need to be noticed, seen, heard, understood, accepted. A recognition of the hard work that they do without expecting praise, but touched that it's seen. A recognition of the burden they are carrying, and grateful for the help offered. A recognition of the minority voice spoken out in nervousness, but glad even if only heard. A recognition that the unrealistic expectations we put on them, and relieved that at last someone might be able to do something about it.

People we rarely ask, 'What do **you** want? What do **you** need?' because they're never really seen, and rarely ever appreciated. Might there be someone in your life of whom you might ask

that very question, today, or later this week. And just like Jesus, show that you have noticed, you have heard, you have seen, and you have paid attention?

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Amen

ⁱ Karen Chakoian, Feasting on the Gospels, Mark, p333