

“What Do You Want Jesus to Do?”

James W. Moore shares, “Some years ago in a small village in the Midwest, a little twelve-year old girl named Terri was babysitting her little brother. Terri walked outside to check the mail. As she turned back from the mailbox, she couldn’t believe her eyes. The house was on fire. So very quickly the little house was enveloped in flames.

Terri ran as fast as she could into the flaming house only to find her baby brother trapped by a burning rafter which had fallen and pinned him to the floor. Hurriedly, Terri worked to free her brother. She had trouble getting him loose as the flames were dancing around their heads. Finally, she freed him. She picked him up and quickly took him outside and revived him just as the roof of the house caved in.

By this time, firemen were on the scene and the neighbors had gathered outside the smoldering remains of the house. The neighbors had been too frightened to go inside or to do anything to help, and they were tremendously impressed with the courage of the twelve-year old girl. They congratulated her for her heroic efforts and said, ‘Terri, you are so very brave. Weren’t you scared? What were you thinking about when you ran into the burning house?’” Moore said, **“I love Terri’s answer. She said, ‘I wasn’t thinking about anything. I just heard my little brother crying.’”**

Moore asks, “Let me ask you something? How long has it been? How long has it been since you heard your brother or sister crying? How long has it been since you stopped and did something about it?” (James W. Moore, Collected Sermons, Christian Globe Networks, Inc.)

In the beginning of today’s Gospel Lectionary Reading, something very revealing happened. As I read, again, verses 46 through 48, listen specifically for the way the crowd treated the blind beggar. Mark wrote in **verses 46-48, “They came to Jericho, and as Jesus was leaving with his disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus son of Timaeus was sitting by the road. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, ‘Jesus! Son of David! Have mercy on me!’ Many of the people scolded him and told him to be quiet. But he shouted even more loudly, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’”** The crowd belittled the blind beggar and sought to prevent him from continuing to seek Jesus’ help! They didn’t expect Jesus to pay much attention to Bartimaeus’ pleas for help. One might say their rejection of blind, poor, and needy persons showed an absence of hospitality toward the hurting, powerless, and vulnerable.

However, Jesus was radically hospitable toward everyone, even persons, who were rejected by Jewish society! Like the 12 year old Terri, Jesus listened to the cries of his brother in need. He demonstrated this welcoming and loving approach in **verse 49, “Jesus stopped and said, ‘Call him.’ So they called the blind man. ‘Cheer up!’ they said. ‘Get up, he is calling you.’”** As followers of Jesus, we are called to also live out Radical Hospitality toward everyone, especially those rejected by our society.

Many folks are unwilling to live that way of Radical Hospitality because they are either afraid of the resulting repercussions for themselves or they simply refuse to see – to be moved to help those in need. Rev. Billy D. Strayhorn demonstrated this dynamic by sharing the following humorous story, “Two psychiatrists were talking and one asked the other, ‘What was your most difficult case?’

His colleague answered, ‘Once I had a patient who lived in a pure fantasy world. He believed that a wildly rich uncle in South America was going to leave him a fortune. All day long he waited for a make-believe letter to arrive from a fictitious attorney. He never went out or did anything. He just sat around and waited.’

‘What was the result?’ asked the first psychiatrist.”

“Well, it was an eight-year struggle but I finally cured him. And then that stupid letter arrived.”

Strayhorn concluded, “Some people are afraid to open their eyes. And some just keep their eyes closed no matter what.” (Billy D. Strayhorn, From the Pulpit, CSS Publishing Company, Inc.)

On the other hand, Bartimaeus was very willing and anxious to come to Jesus for sight and insight! Mark explained in **verse 50, “So he threw off his cloak, jumped up, and came to Jesus.”** Each of us, at one time or another, needs help in seeing – coming to perceive the truth. Recognizing this, Pastor Steven E. Albertin told the following story,

“In my church secretary’s office there hangs a modernistic picture composed of a maze of colors and shapes. I realized these sophisticated, modern, and abstract pictures were supposed to contain some profound artistic or philosophical message, but I never was able to figure it out. It just looked like a jumbled mass of confusion. If there was a message there, I was blind to it.”

Albertin continued, “One day while I was standing in the office, waiting for the copier to warm up, one of the congregation’s kindergarten-age boys, Adam, stood beside me and said, ‘Do you see what I see?’ ‘Do you see something in that picture?’ ‘I sure don’t.’ Adam looked at me with glee in his eye, ‘Pastor, can’t you see him? It’s Jesus hanging on the cross.’ I stared as hard as I could, until my eyes actually hurt from staring. I wanted to believe Adam and that there actually was the image of Jesus hanging on the cross hidden somewhere in that mass of color and shapes, but I couldn’t see Jesus anywhere. ‘Adam, I’m sorry but I must be blind. You will have to help me see.’

Directing his finger to a mass of color in the center of the picture, Adam said, ‘There, Pastor. Do you see what I see? There is Jesus, his face, his arms outstretched on the cross.’ And then, like an epiphany, the image began to appear. Yes, there hidden somehow ‘behind’ the colors and the shapes was the barely visible image of Jesus, hanging with arms outstretched on the cross.” **Albertin concluded, “It’s amazing, Adam. You have helped one blind pastor to see Jesus. Yes, I can see what you see, Adam.”** (Steven E. Albertin, *Against the Grain*, CSS Publishing Company, Inc.)

Now we come to the crucial moment of today’s Reading. Mark reported in **verse 51**, **“‘What do you want me to do for you?’ Jesus asked him. ‘Teacher,’ the blind man answered, ‘I want to see again.’”** How did Bartimaeus decide on a good answer to Jesus’ question? How will you determine your answer?

King Duncan shared this following story to help us go through a good process for developing our answers to Jesus’ question, “Thousands of years ago a young Chinese emperor called upon his family’s most trusted advisor. ‘Oh, learned counselor,’ said the emperor, ‘you have advised my father and grandfather. What is the single most important advice you can give me to rule my country?’” **“And Confucius replied, ‘The first thing you must do is to define the problem.’”**

Duncan explained, “Many unhappy people cannot put their finger on what is really causing their distress. Many unfulfilled people cannot even tell you what it would take to satisfy them. Many of us have no clear idea or conception what our real needs, our real desires, and our real priorities are.” Duncan concluded, **“And because we have never defined the problem or clarified our goals, we spend a lifetime anxiously wandering with very little to show for the pilgrimage.”** (King Duncan, *Collected Sermons*, www.Sermons.com)

The blind beggar, Bartimaeus, clearly understood what he needed – **“I want to see again.”** The Reading concluded with **verse 52**, **“‘Go,’ Jesus told him, ‘your faith has made you well.’ At once he was able to see and followed Jesus on the road.”**

How do you answer Jesus’ question? What do you want him to do? **How do you define what causes you distress? What is the most important problem for you?**

It is helpful for us to focus on the dynamics between the crowd and Bartimaeus and Jesus and Bartimaeus. **You and I are called to follow Jesus’ example of Radical Hospitality toward Bartimaeus, as well as, his welcome and agape loving care toward all of the persons, who were outcasts – rejected by Jewish society and who came to Jesus for help!** So, one common need most of us have is for strength and guidance to enable us to embody Radical Hospitality toward everyone! We are a very friendly and welcoming congregation but, unconsciously, if not consciously, all people have been indoctrinated with prejudicial views about one or more groups of the human race. **Let’s ask our Lord and Savior for guidance and empowerment through the Holy Spirit, so we more completely manifest Radical Hospitality!**

Our culture and society is dominated by an emphasis on personal profit and the gratification of our personal physical desires. So, another need most of us experience is to be transformed from being a self-centered person to being an agape loving child of God and new person in Christ. Consider again, what you want Jesus to do for you, for us, and for all people! **Pray for what you need Jesus to do for you. Have faith in God’s Son, Jesus Christ, and Trust in God’s Love! After you are healed and transformed, live boldly Jesus’ way of Radical Hospitality and Self-Giving Agape Love! Amen.**