

**Title:** Asking Jesus: Invitation

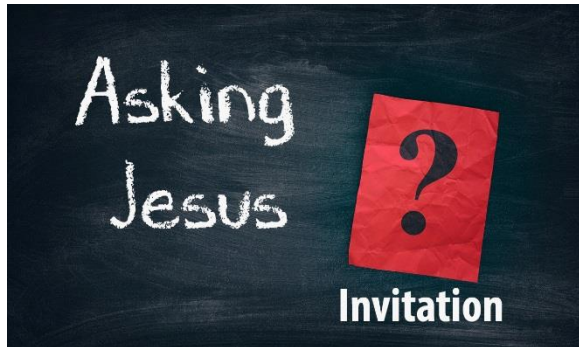
**Date:** March 4 & 5, 2017

**Preaching:** Senior Minister Randy Spleth

**Scripture:** [John 1:35-42](#)

**Text:** [Mark 10:46-52](#)

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Let's start with the question before we talk about the questions. Today's question is "What do you want me to do for you?" That's not my question. It's Jesus' question and it is a big, life question, which Jesus asks over and over again in slightly different ways. Today, we begin the season of Lent looking at the questions that Jesus

asks, probing open-ended questions that challenge and stretch. I have selected nine questions that force us to reflect on some of the biggest questions of the Christian life. I think it will be a wonderful way to follow Jesus to Jerusalem, to the cross and to his resurrection on Easter.

Narrowing it down to just nine questions was harder than you think. Have you noticed that Jesus asks a ton of questions? In every situation, Jesus is asking. **"Most people go to the gospels to see what Jesus will say, not to see what Jesus will ask."**<sup>1</sup> In the four gospels Jesus asks 307 different questions. By contrast, he is only asked 183 questions. Strikingly, Jesus answers very few of the questions he is asked.<sup>2</sup> Usually he answers a question with a question. Jesus is not the ultimate Answer Man— he's more like the Great Questioner. Jesus should be nicknamed, "asking Jesus."

Jesus didn't ask questions because he didn't know the answer. He asked questions because he cared. He asked questions because they teach. He asked questions because he wants his followers to think.

Questions inspire people to discover something new. They create intimacy because of the dialog around the question. Questions create growth. Open ended questions can put us in touch of our greatest desire.

So, we start with today's question and the different ways Jesus asks it. "What do you want me to do?" (Mark 10:51) It is an essential question of faith. What *do* you want Jesus to do for you? What do you want from Jesus? Why are you looking for me? Who are you looking for? That's the many

ways Jesus asks the questions but they are essentially one in the same, an invitation to explore a relationship with Jesus.

The first question that Jesus asks is the first words that he speaks. It is the only story that we have of Jesus as a child and it is fascinating that the first thing out of his mouth is this big life question. You remember the story. Mary and Joseph take Jesus on a visit to Jerusalem for the Passover. According to Luke, Joseph and Mary lose track of their twelve year old son Jesus. Every parent that has ever had that experience knows the panic. If you've lost your child in the mall, misplaced her for a moment at the park, left him at home when you went on a Christmas vacation, you know what the holy couple felt. They rush back to Jerusalem and "After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions." (Luke 2:46) Jesus is 12 years old and he is asking questions. That shouldn't surprise us. That's what kids do.

But this story is a foreshadowing of what is to come because what follows is the first of the 183 questions which are asked to Jesus. "When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety. He said to them, 'Why were you looking for me?'" (Luke 2:48-49) Jesus answers a question with a question. Actually, when he sees their puzzled and pained look, he adds a second question. "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49)

Why are you looking for Jesus? When you look for someone, you want something from him. In this case, you could argue that his parents wanted simply to retrieve the custody of their child. But given where the question is asked, in the Temple, and the follow-up question that Jesus poses, something larger is at hand. Don't think of this as just a nice story from his youth. Jesus is asking a big life question. Why are you looking for Jesus? What do you want from Jesus?

Open ended questions invite exploration; they expand our thinking. The answer to an open-ended question is not obvious or implied and it can also change over time, so it helps to keep such a question continually before you.<sup>3</sup> Mary does this for the story ends with "Mary treasured all these things in her heart." (Luke 2:51)

And Jesus does it also, keeps the question before him because the next time we hear him speak, at least in the gospel of John, he asks the question again. You heard the story in our scripture lesson. John the Baptist knew who Jesus was. The Spirit witnessed to him. So he named Jesus to two of his disciples, "Behold the Lamb of God". The two men took John's words to heart and immediately left and followed Jesus. When Jesus "...turned and saw them following, he said to them, 'What are you looking for?'" (John

1:38) He knows what they are looking for even before he asks. That's the way it is with Jesus. He doesn't want an answer. He's ask the question for their sakes. "What are you looking for?" (John 1:38). What do you want? What are you longing for?

Jesus knows that this is the ultimate question, knows that deep within us is a longing, an aching hunger. But we don't always know how to fill it. We don't know what we are looking for. Saint Augustine observed that "our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God." The philosopher Blaise Pascal made a similar point when he said that each of us is "born with an empty place in our hearts—a void—that is the shape of God" and this means that nothing or no one else can fill it.

We are born with restless hearts, and his question cuts like a knife, makes hearts burn with the questions we are born asking ourselves:

What am I doing in this world? What happens when I die? How should I live? What path should I follow to find happiness and satisfaction? What is that you really need, not just on the surface, but deep down into the core of your being? What are you looking for?

That is what a big life, open-ended question does. It causes you to ask all sorts of other questions. The irony is they answer his question with a question. Usually it is the other way around. At first blush it looks like they are embarrassed and don't understand that Jesus has just posed this gigantic question about life. "They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "Where are you staying?" (John 1:38) That's the most logical translation but is limited. The word really means, abiding, dwelling. When the disciples respond to Jesus' query with their own question, they are not asking Jesus for the location of his tent, or the address of the guest house at which he is visiting; they want to know about the enduring, permanent, eternal, undying dwelling place of Jesus. Where are you staying? Where can we find you? Where shall we go to be with you, to receive what you have to offer? Where can we be in your presence; abide in you?<sup>4</sup> Like Mary, they sense a need to connect and treasure in their hearts. This time, Jesus answers a question and with it, gives a hint to how we address this big question. He simply gives them an invitation. "Come and see." Come and see, come and explore, come and discover what you are looking for, what you want me to do for me.

Seeing is important which is how the question is offered again. It is at the other end of Jesus ministry, not at the beginning but near the end. Jesus and his disciples are on the road to Jerusalem. Just as they are leaving the city of Jericho, out of the crowd they hear a voice. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mark 10:47c) It is the voice a blind beggar named Bartimaeus. The crowd tries to quiet him but he will have nothing of it. He

keeps crying out for mercy. "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stops, stands still and calls him. He jumps up and comes to Jesus and "Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mark 10:51)

This is a big open-ended question about life. Again, Jesus doesn't ask the question to gather information. Jesus know that this question, of all of his questions, is going to say a lot about a person's soul and well-being. What are you looking for? What do you want? What do you want from me? His questions are a mirror that he is holding up and inviting us to peer into, to come and see.

It is a little like the first book and movie of the Harry Potter series, The Sorcerer's Stone, Harry finds himself in one of the Hogwarts castle's many mysterious rooms. In it, he sees a large, ornate mirror. When he peers into the looking glass, he miraculously sees his parents, who appear to stand behind him and also gaze into the mirror. Harry is an orphan and deeply misses his parents, who were killed fighting against the evil Voldemort when Harry was young.

He runs to get his friend Ron and brings him to the secret room and its magical mirror, wanting to "introduce" Ron to his parents. But when Ron looks into the mirror, Ron sees himself being carried on the shoulders of his quidditch teammates and celebrated as the one who won the game. Perplexed, they both go to their mentor and teacher Dumbledore, who explains that this is a very magical mirror whose special property is to reflect back to the one who looks into it "their true heart's desire." Harry has always felt alone in the world, without a family, without the continuing love of his parents. Ron has always felt unacknowledged and undervalued by his peers. And so when they look into the mirror, each sees what he most wants in the world.<sup>5</sup>

Sometimes when Jesus asks what someone wants, he not only gives them what they ask for but what they need as well. Bartimaeus initially asked for mercy. He wanted a coin or two. That's what beggars expected and hoped for. But when Jesus invites him to explore the bigger question, "What do you want from me?", when he asks him to look into that mirror at his self-reflection and see what he wanted most in the world, he saw something that he never thought was possible, his true heart's desire. "What do you want me to do for you?" With confidence and clarity, Bartimaeus says, "My teacher, let me see again." (Mark 10:51) In Mark, the recovery of sight isn't just a physical miracle; it's symbolic of discipleship. It means, "I want to see and follow you, Lord." I want to abide in you. I want to dwell with you. I want to treasure all that you have to offer in my heart.

This is exactly what happens next: "Go," Jesus says, "your faith has made you well." (Mark 10:52) And Bartimaeus follows Jesus along the road.

Bartimaeus knows what he wants. He knows what he wants: to see and follow his Lord, to find his rest in him and filled the God shaped void in his heart.

The question that Jesus asked his parents, the question he puts to his first disciples, and Bartimaeus is the same one he puts to you and me, and to every man and woman in every time and place. Why are you looking for me? What are you looking for? What do you want me to do for you?

What do we want from Jesus? Deep in our souls, we are looking for something to believe in and hold on to, something important enough to live for, and something big enough to claim our passions. We are looking for challenge and purpose. We are looking for God to fill that heart shaped void and end the restless.<sup>6</sup>

What begins with curiosity becomes a step toward addressing the deepest need that we have. God calls us to a path that leads us to what we long for most and it all begins with this essential question of faith. What do you want me to do for you? I hope you hear the invitation to explore, to set out on a quest. Did you notice? The word question contains the word quest.<sup>7</sup>

Act on that invitation. Look into the mirror of the question and treasure it. Abide and dwell in in Jesus. If you do, God will draw you toward an answer for that heart shaped void even when you don't recognize its happening. What Rainer Maria Rilke said is true. "Live the questions now. Perhaps then someday in the future, you will gradually without ever noticing it, live your way into the answer."

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas Estes, *The Questions in Meyer*, BRILL publishing, 2012, pg 2.

<sup>2</sup> Copenhaver, Martin B.. *Jesus Is the Question: The 307 Questions Jesus Asked and the 3 He Answered* (Kindle Locations 185-188). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> Copenhaver, Martin B.. *Jesus Is the Question: The 307 Questions Jesus Asked and the 3 He Answered* (Kindle Locations 308-311). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

<sup>4</sup>Audrey West, @ [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=24](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=24)

<sup>5</sup> Dias, Elizabeth. *What Did Jesus Ask?: Christian Leaders Reflect on His Questions of Faith* (p. 136). Time. Kindle Edition.

<sup>6</sup> Come and See, Brett Younger @ <http://www.ministrymatters.com/teach/entry/4600/come-and-see>

<sup>7</sup> Copenhaver, Martin B.. *Jesus Is the Question: The 307 Questions Jesus Asked and the 3 He Answered* (Kindle Locations 308-311). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.