

Rev. Dr. Chris Montovino
John 1:35-42
January 28, 2024

What Do You Want?

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus asked more than 307 questions. Even from the very beginning moments with Jesus' disciples, he was asking questions. But he only gave direct answers to eight of those questions. So he was forty times more likely to ask a question than he was to answer one. Perhaps that tells us the nature of his questions.

These are deep questions that peer in the heart of the hearers. Even us. Questions that get us to ponder, consider, and chew on what the answers might mean for ourselves.

In early December, I was sitting by the fire at a friend's mountain cabin reading today's passage. And I came to Jesus' question, "What do you want?" And I thought, that is a great question. What do I want? So I spent time in the quietness, journaling through all the things that longed for in my soul. What did I want from my life, my relationships, my calling, from Jesus.

It's amazing that the God of the universe loves us that much, cares for us that much, that God wants to know what we desire.

And so that is the question that we direct our attentions to today. Jesus asks his disciples, "What do you want?"

Today's story comes at the very beginning of the Gospel of John right after John the Baptist announced Jesus' coming and baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. Matthew, Mark, and Luke also tell this story as Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee when he encountered two of John's disciples. But only John recounted the question Jesus asked them.

Please join me as we read from John 1:35-42.

35 The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. **36** When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"

37 When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. **38** Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?"

They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?"

39 "Come," he replied, "and you will see."

So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

40 Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. **41** The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ).

42 And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which, when translated, is Peter).

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

What do you want? That is a question that we’ve all heard recently. At Christmastime, we ask that question of those that we love to make sure we get them exactly what their heart desires. There’s nothing worse than spending a lot of time and energy getting that perfect gift for someone than to have them return it the next day.

This year Karen and I both wanted the same thing. Adventure. So instead of focusing on material things, we invested in an experience together. So this Thursday, she and I will be traveling to Las Vegas to see the rock band U2 in concert at The Sphere. I am so excited! If I seem to be floating on air next Sunday morning, then you’ll know why.

There is a song by U2 that I think speaks to this human longing. That aims to answer this question Jesus asks, “What do you want?” Bono trills.

I have climbed highest mountains
I have run through the fields
Only to be with you
Only to be with you
I have run
I have crawled
I have scaled these city walls
These city walls
Only to be with you

But I still haven't found what I'm looking for
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for

I have kissed honey lips
Felt the healing in her fingertips
It burned like fire
This burning desire
I have spoke with the tongue of angels
I have held the hand of a devil
It was warm in the night
I was cold as a stone

But I still haven't found what I'm looking for

But I still haven't found what I'm looking for

I believe in the kingdom come
Then all the colors will bleed into one
Bleed into one
But yes I'm still running
You broke the bonds
And you loosed the chains
Carried the cross
Of my shame
Oh my shame
You know I believe it

But I still haven't found what I'm looking for
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for¹

James and John, Andrew and Simon Peter, each fishermen who became the first of Jesus' disciples were looking for something. Looking for someone. John the Baptist was intriguing enough, but he himself said, "I am not the One you are looking for." "The One you desire is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry...I baptize you with water for repentance, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."²

What you are looking for is The Messiah, The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

And then pointing to Jesus John said, "Look there he is, the Lamb of God!"

I love Jesus' sense of humor here. It almost seems like a scene out of Monty Python and the Holy Grail. Jesus turns around, looks at Andrew and Simon Peter, and says "What?" "What do you want?"

The Greek word for want is zeteo. There are some 117 occurrences in the Greek New Testament. It means to desire, to endeavor, or to seek after. It's the same word that was used to describe the Magi who had followed the stars and had came in search of the one who had been born king of the Jews. Remember that?

What Andrew and Simon Peter thought they wanted in the Messiah was one who would restore the kingdom of Israel, rebuild its splendor, and make it great

¹ Musixmatch Songwriters: Paul David Hewson / Adam Clayton / Larry Mullen / Dave Evans, I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For lyrics © Polygram Int. Music Publishing B.v.

² Matthew 3:11

again. You see there really isn't anything new under the sun. We are still trying to relive past glory days instead of embracing the reality of today.

What they wanted...what they really, really, wanted... what their hearts desired, I think was revealed in what they asked for next.

"Rabbi, where are you staying?"

The Greek word for stay is meno. There are some 118 occurrences in the Greek New Testament. It means to abide, to dwell, or to remain.

What they were saying to Jesus was, "We want to be with you. We want to go where you are going. We want to abide with you." Remind you, this was before Jesus had done any miracles or had preached any sermons. Still something deep down inside drew them to Jesus.

And Jesus said, "Come and you will see."

So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him.

What do we want from Jesus today?

In the Gospel of Mark there is another story where Jesus asks someone this same question.³

As Jesus and his disciples were walking on the way to Jericho, a blind man, called Bartimaeus, was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was walking by he yelled out "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me."

Jesus stopped and said, "Call him."

So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped up to his feet and came to Jesus.

"What do you want me to do for you? Jesus asked him.

Ok. Let's pause here for a moment...and remember, whenever Jesus asks a question, it is never because he doesn't know the answer to it. He asks to see if we know the answer to his question.

The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see."

"Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

Now again, if we take this man's answer at face value, we see that he got what he asked for. His sight. But I think what he really wanted, in the depth of his soul, was something more. He wanted to remain with Jesus, to follow him along the road, to be with him.

Meno.

What do we want from Jesus this morning? Are we sure?

³ Mark 10:46-52

If not, then what do we really want?

Do we think, like this blind man, that if we asked it of him, that Jesus would give it to us?

Toward the end of Jesus' public ministry, John recorded a very thorough account of Jesus' teaching to his disciples. He had just explained how he was going away and where he was going they could not follow him. They could not "meno." And they were deeply disturbed.

Jesus "I am the vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

Now listen to this... "Meno" in me. Remain in me and I in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a person remains in me and I in them, they will bear much fruit, apart from me you can do nothing."

"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be given to you."

"Remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain his love...My command is this: love each other as I have loved you."

Ten times in seventeen verses, Jesus used this word "meno" to remain, to abide or be with.

Remain in me.

Let my words remain in you.

Remain in my love

Let my commands remain in you.

Love each other as I have loved you.

What the disciples truly wanted was for Jesus not to leave them. They wanted to remain with him. Meno.

So Jesus encouraged them that as long as they remembered his words and followed his command to love others as he had loved them...then he would always be with them through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Just before Moses death when Joshua would lead the Israelites into the Promised Land, Moses reminded Joshua of the Promise of God. "Be strong and courageous. The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you, nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."⁴

What do we want this morning?

⁴ Deuteronomy 31:7-8

Is it to have enough bread for our table today or a roof over our heads? Jesus says remain in me and I will be with you. Meno.

Is it a new job? Jesus says remain in me and I will be with you. Meno.

Is it wisdom to know which direction to take next in life? Jesus says remain in me and I will be with you. Meno.

Is it to be healed of our sickness? Jesus says remain in me and I will be with you. Meno.

Is it to have a broken relationship restored? Jesus says remain in me and I will be with you. Meno.

Is it to have peace in our war weary world? Jesus says remain in me and I will be with you. Meno.

Is it to have comfort as we face yet another acrimonious election year? Jesus says remain in me and I will be with you. Meno.

Is it to not be afraid of dying or losing someone you love to death? Jesus says remain in me and I will with you. Meno.

“What do you want?” Jesus asks.

Jesus also said, “Ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you.” Just remain in me and I will be with you. Meno.

Amen.