

Brent Stafford: 5/13/21
What Can I Do For You?

“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus says in Mark chapter 10 to a blind man who cried out to him for mercy. The blind man could have asked Jesus for money, he could have asked to be a part of Jesus’s traveling group of disciples, or he could have even asked Jesus to use his power and fame to get a better spot to beg from. Instead, he does something audacious, and he asks for his sightless eyes to be able to see. Jesus restores his sight saying, “your faith has healed you” and he immediately gained his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

In my mind I imagine this blind man following Jesus singing the words of Bob Dylan:

You have given everything to me
What can I do for you?
You have given me eyes to see
What can I do for you?
Pulled me out of bondage and you made me renewed inside
Filled up a hunger that had always been denied
Opened up a door no man can shut, and you opened it up so wide
And you've chosen me to be among the few
What can I do for you?

I have worked as a helping person for most of my professional career, first as a youth and family minister and now as a family therapist in training working on becoming licensed. As a mental health professional, I have a narrow slice of the helping pie in terms of helping individuals that are in crisis or are managing mental health symptoms that can lead them to crisis. It is easy when acting as a helper to become an expert and point out those things that people need to change. Here’s the thing, sometimes it’s not about what someone needs to change, it’s about resolving what’s restraining, impeding, or disrupting someone from making the change that they already want to make.

What I love about Jesus is that his method of helping is often to remove the barriers and restraints that keep people from living the lives that they were created to live. In this story a human being who was created to enjoy the beauty of this world can see what he was always meant to. A huge restraint on this person’s life is resolved. I wonder what significant acts of helping are cut off to us because we act as “expert” helpers telling others what they need. Another way to state this is: Do we allow our interpretation of the grand narrative of faith to inform our helping, rather than listening to the story of the person who needs help and faithfully helping as Christ would?

I'm not a theologian, I just try to help people and so I'll end my thoughts with a question: I wonder how much our church and community would change if we resisted the temptation to act as "experts", telling people what they need, and spent more energy listening to what they need?