

*“What do you want me to do for you?”*

Luke 10: 38-42

Luke 18: 35-43

Congregational Church of Austin, UCC

October 29, 2017

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Use your imagination for a moment. Jesus comes to visit you at your home.

When he shows up at your front door, do you shake his hand? Give him a hug? Kiss him on the cheek? Shaking his hand seems a little too impersonal. Kisses seem a little too personal. Maybe a hug. Or do you jump wildly up and down like someone who's just won the Reader's Digest sweepstake because you're so excited that Jesus has come to visit?

You invite Jesus into your home. What next?

Are you more like Mary or Martha? Martha frets in the kitchen while Mary sits with Jesus. Would you fuss about in the kitchen, worrying about getting this and that just right? Or would you understand that Jesus is there to see you, to spend some time with you?

Sure, you want to be hospitable. When Jesus enters your home, you say, “hear Jesus, sit on the couch or in this chair, wherever you're most comfortable. And your feet, they look dusty and tired, let me get a basin and towel so I can rinse them. And here's a glass of iced tea and something to eat.”

But after providing the basics of hospitality, do you understand that Jesus has come to your home to see you and spend time with you? Hopefully you do. Hopefully, you don't busy yourself in the kitchen, pulling a tray of cookies out of the oven and yelling out to Jesus, “I'll be right back. I've got to run to Walgreens to buy some ice cream to go with the cookies. What do you like better, vanilla or chocolate?” No, hopefully you sit down next to Jesus. Spend time with him. Talk to him, listen to him.

Ok, so now you're sitting down with Jesus in your living room or at your kitchen table. How does it feel? Does it feel a bit uncomfortable or awkward? Or comfortable and natural? Are you nervous or at ease?

What's it like making eye contact with Jesus? Do you look him in the eye? For how long? Is he pretty intense? Does it seem like he can see into you? Or right through you? How does that make you feel? Do you typically hide parts of yourself from other people? Do you have stuff going on inside that you don't want other people to see or know? Not even Jesus? Especially Jesus? Or do you just open up and let it all out? Hide nothing, reveal all.

When you talk to Jesus, what do you talk about?

Do you ask him, “so, how was your trip? Did you hit a lot of traffic coming into Austin?”

Talk about the weather? “It's nice you came in October. The temperatures are getting cooler now. Good sleeping weather.”

Do you engage in chit-chat like that? It kind of seems like a waste of time. After all, this is Jesus Christ sitting in the room with you.

Or do you talk politics? “So, what do you think about Donald Trump? What about the Christian right? How about gay marriage? How would you handle North Korea?”

Or would you ask him questions about himself? “Ok, I’ve always wanted to know, all those healing and exorcism stories, did they *really* happen? Why did the moneychangers in the Temple anger you so much? What does the parable of the talents really mean? Which gospel is your favorite? And what do you think of Paul’s interpretation of you?”

It sure would be nice to get the definitive answer to those question, straight from the horse’s mouth, but is that what you really want to talk to Jesus about? Do you think that’s why Jesus came to see you and spend time with you, to clear up some of these questions? Once he left, would you feel satisfied that you had made the best use of your time with him? Again, this is Jesus Christ we’re talking about.

Let’s draw some imagery from another story now, the story in which Jesus asks the blind man, “what do you want me to do for you?”

Jesus is in your living room sitting on your couch, or in your kitchen sitting at your table. He leans toward you a bit, reaches out to touch your hand, and with his look that looks right through you, he asks you, “what you want me to do for you?”

What’s your answer?

At least now you know what you’re talking about. “What do you want me to do for you?”

In a moment, I’m going to ask you to take a few minutes to answer that question. You can ask for anything. But there are two ground rules you must follow when answering.

Ground rule number one: you can’t ask Jesus to do something for somebody else. The question is, “what do you want me to do *for you?*” *For you.*

So you can’t answer, “Please heal the pain in my partner’s life.”

“Please bring about justice for all the DACA ‘dreamers’ and their parents.”

“Please heal all the people addicted to opioids.”

“Please ‘bring down the powerful from their thrones and lift up the lowly, fill the hungry with good things, and send the rich away empty,’ just like your mother sang in her song.”

You can’t ask for those things. Jesus came to see *you*, and he’s asking *you*, “what can I do for *you?*”

Now you can say, “please give me more compassion, so I can better respond to my partner’s pain.”

“Please give me a fiercer and more courageous heart, so I can be a bolder advocate for justice.”

You can ask for something that will enable *you* to do something for others. That’s OK.

Ground rule number two: you must suspend judgement as to whether you think Jesus can really give you what you ask. You can’t say to yourself, “I’m not going to ask for *that* because I don’t really believe Jesus can give me *that*, or I don’t think Jesus can really do *that* for me.”

Right now, that’s beside the point. The question is not, “do you believe Jesus can really deliver?” Suspend that question for now. The question is, “what do you want me to do for you?” Or said otherwise, “what do you most need in your life right now?”

What do you most need in your life right now?

Identify that need. Tell yourself what it is. Tell Jesus what it is.

Do you have a wound that needs healing? A physical wound? A psychological or emotional wound? A spiritual wound or soul wound? Maybe a wound you’ve never told anyone else about, but you know it’s there, and you know the effect it’s had on your life, and more than anything else you want it healed.

Do you need forgiveness? From someone else? From yourself? Are you carrying a burden of guilt that you want lifted?

Do you need to stop feeling shame? Shame is not thinking you did something wrong. Shame is believing that you *are* wrong. That you are inherently wrong, inherently flawed, not good enough.

Do you need to stop feeling depressed? Need to be reconciled with someone? Need to experience authentic joy in your life? Need to be less busy? Need more time with your family? Need closer and more meaningful friendships?

Do you need some power, capacity or skill? A greater capacity to comfort other people. A more courageous heart to seek justice. More sensitivity. More patience. More fierceness.

“What do you want me to do for you?”

What do I need most of all in my life right now?

Again, don't fret over whether you think you'll actually get it. There is great power in simply identifying your most pressing need. There can be great power, healing and grace in simply making it known. To yourself. And maybe, if possible, to a trusted Christ-like friend or loved one. Simply identifying what you most need in your life might even set you on a path toward getting that need met.

So take a few minutes now to sit in silence and to answer that question. What is my greatest need in my life right now? After a few minutes, the trio will start playing, and when they do, I invite you to come forward to tie your prayer tie on to our prayer net. Your prayer tie represents your request. It represents your greatest need in your life right now.

Our greatest needs are uniquely personal to us, and each one of us has one. So let us have compassion on ourselves, and compassion for one another, as we come forward with our need, and as we stand together as a people in need.