

You Can't Always Get What You Want (From Jesus)

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Luke 9:51-62

51When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. 52And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; 53but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. 54When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" 55But he turned and rebuked them. 56Then they went on to another village.

57As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." 58And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." 59To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." 60But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." 61Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." 62Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

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We are going to do a little refresher/ pop quiz here.

Last week we left with the story of the demon possessed man, the Gerasene Demented, who gets healed by Jesus. I want us to remember what happened at the very end. When he gets healed by Jesus. Does anyone remember?

He begs to go with Jesus and to follow him, but Jesus tells him that he must return to his home to the people that chained him up in the first place for he has work to do.

And I have to believe that that was really challenging, maybe even more challenging than being held by all 10,000 of those demons all of those years because it meant that he had to go back home and face all those people he knew before, people who maybe tried their best, but ultimately didn't treat him very well, and get them to accept him as he is: a man healed of his demons by Jesus.

And, more importantly, he is to share that good news with them to tell them what God is about and what God has done for him.

And I have to wonder if that seemed pretty disappointing to the man formerly demon possessed in the country of the Gerasenes.

Frankly, the man from Gerasene doesn't receive from Jesus what he wants to hear, but he might receive from Jesus what he needs to hear.

It's akin to that great line from the Rolling Stones, you can't always get what you want, but if you try sometimes, you just might find, you get what you need.

In our gospel for this Sunday we get two different stories, all about people who want one thing from Jesus, but are given the opposite.

We are coming to a time in the gospel of Luke when following Jesus means turning towards Jerusalem, impending death on the cross and revilement from the Romans and Jewish leaders. Jesus has set his mind towards what will happen and is hoping that everything he has taught the disciples will continue to spread.

But the Disciples are in a different mode. Just shortly before our passage for today we get them arguing over who is the greatest, something which they get scolded for. And now they are getting scolded because they want to bring down fire from heaven to wipe out this Samaritan village for not receiving Jesus.

Shockingly enough, Jesus is not okay with that.

The disciples want vengeance and they forget that Jesus is all about peace. It's not what they want to hear, but it is what they need to hear.

We might laugh at that request the fire balls from heaven, getting the ax from Jesus, but what about when we want something or want to do something that feels so real and valid and understandable. What if we pray with all our might, but we find that Jesus isn't responding in the way that we prayed for? What if we think that we're going down the right path only to find dead ends.

Jesus is obviously not going to smite our enemies, no matter how hard we pray, but what about our asks for Jesus to heal our loved ones or bring peace to this world or change, and justice that will benefit those in need or to give us some answers to whether we are doing the right thing.

I know there are so many cliches out there about prayer and asking for what you need. Right? If you just pray hard enough. I think it was just a couple of weeks ago where Jesus himself said, ask me for anything and I will do it.

Well what do we do if we have asked Jesus for that thing and it doesn't seem to be happening? We know what we want, but we're not getting it or at least, it isn't being answered in the way that we hoped for.

The second part of our gospel may at first seem puzzling because it is a group of people asking Jesus for something that seems very genuine and fair, they want to go with Jesus on his way to Jerusalem, so I'd like to go through it.

The first time the person says, I will follow you wherever you go. And Jesus responds with something cryptic about animals having places to sleep but he, the Son of Man, having no where to lay his head. Jesus reminds those wishing to follow him that he is on the move, he is marching towards Jerusalem and can't stop now. And to follow Jesus there means to suffer as he suffers.

The second person asks to follow but first wants to bury his father. Jesus tells him let the dead bury their dead but as for you go and proclaim the kingdom of God. Now this is less about burying a dead person and pastoral care with grief and more to do with the difference between life and death.

To follow Jesus means that we are focusing on life and bringing life to those who only know death, it is more of a bigger analogy and metaphor for the work of those who follow Jesus.

The third has to do with the same thing. The person asks to say goodbye to those who he knew before. But Jesus says that those who plow a field must look forward, not backwards. That makes sense if you'd got a large piece of farming equipment, you've got to look ahead.

Now these examples of what the people want from Jesus are definitely different from the disciples' desire for vengeance. But somehow what they want is apparently not what Jesus thinks they need.

And you know what? I bet that none of those people thought that that was going to be the answer that Jesus gave them.

I don't think it is what they wanted to hear from Jesus.

And I don't think they probably understood it fully when Jesus told them.

I bet that it took some time.

I wonder if you've ever thought about what it is like to have patience with God or with Jesus?

And I say this knowing that I am not the person to tell you how to have patience, I am incredibly impatient. When I would like something to happen, I want it to happen right away, right now and I am stubborn too so I ultimately want it to be my vision.

And I think it might be a bit of a family trait because my youngest nephew, Corin who is visiting me this week so he can come and do VBS also understands what it is like to be impatient. When he was a little bit smaller, we used to tell him that he needed to be patient and he would say, I'm waiting... patiently.

I bet those folks who asked if they could come along with Jesus and the man from Gerasene who was possessed by the demons too were pretty disappointed when Jesus didn't tell them what they wanted to hear and I bet they felt angry and annoyed and most definitely impatient. It probably felt pretty similar to what it is like to pray and hope for something, to believe that Jesus will come in and whoosh, all those problems will be gone. But then to realize that the answer that Jesus gives is not what we expected and in the moment it might not feel like very good news at the time.

So how does what Jesus give these people what they need?

Instead of dropping their old lives and running away with Jesus they are sent back to care for those in their own communities, to bring life where there is death, to share the good news with those in need, and to look forward to what work lies ahead in the places where they are already planted.

For them and for us Jesus says the kingdom of God and the good news is already here, it's already present in their own lives and in their communities and that's what we *need* to hear.

1. And ultimately when the kingdom of God is concerned that purpose is to know the good news for yourself and to share that good news with others
  - a. And this good news isn't that we will just get what we want or that today is a nice day.
  - b. It is deeper than that. The good news is a reminder that everything Jesus stood for is what Jesus wants for you. And that is life, it is release from the demons that divide you and us, it is knowing you have a community of people, it is knowing that you are loved

it is knowing that Jesus doesn't always give us the answer we want or expect and sometimes we have to be patient with that. But Jesus does answer us and Jesus reminds us that whether we are following him to Jerusalem or returning to our homes, the Good news will go with us and Jesus will be with us.