

## First Church of Squantum

### What Do You Want?

**Matthew 8: 2, 5-7; 9: 21; Luke 9: 38; 17: 12-14; 18: 35, 38, 40-42**

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Last week I spoke about our absolute need to place our trust in a God who actually loves us. This morning I want us to seriously think about what it is exactly that you really want. In the scripture readings we hear about a number of people who asked Jesus for specific help and the result of their asking for this help. Now we claim that when we gather in Jesus' name that he is present and we also believe that Jesus lives. If this is the case, then what is so different for us than what it was for those individuals we just heard about? We are told that there were crowds wherever Jesus went and many in those crowds had problems and illnesses who merely stood by and watched. They did not ask Jesus for his help. The difference was that those who asked actually believed that Jesus could heal them and this is evidenced by Jesus claiming that it was their faith that healed them. It is our faith that enables God to respond to our prayers.

So, if Jesus is present here this morning just like he was present in the stories we have just heard, what exactly is it that you would ask of him? When Solomon was asked by God what he wanted, he asked for wisdom. Now we have all heard the saying, "Be careful what you ask for because you may receive it." So this is not a casual exercise when we actually call out to Jesus for his specific help. Much thought and prayer have to go into it and you want to think clearly about the consequences. We have also heard the saying that, "God will not give you more than you are able to handle." Now this is one that often is said when we are over whelmed by a series of events and are struggling to see our way forward. Certainly that poem Footsteps speaks to God helping when we are struggling.

An important Bible passage for me is the one where Jesus tells us that from those who have received much, more is expected. This means that as we receive blessings of any kind we are expected to give more and it is left up to each one of us to decide just how much we have received. Last week I referred to the many stories in the Bible regarding faith and stories we read about regarding more recent people who have done remarkable things that seem impossible without God's help. How did they have the faith necessary to even begin to attempt what they eventually achieved? What exactly caused them to believe they had any chance of success? In most cases if they told anyone what they were going to attempt the response was almost always negative. The saying, "The longest journey begins with a single step," applies here. I want to change that to, "The most important life journey begins with a single prayer."

When you are able and willing to actually place your future into God's hands by asking for specific help you will discover that your future has been changed forever. It is the decision to leave our comfort zone that may be what holds most of us back. It may be a fear of the unknown that prevents many from taking that plunge. Just think back to when you first took off those training wheels and rode a two wheel bike for the first time. Or

when you actually took your finger off the edge of the pool, your toe off the bottom or put away some floatation device you had been using and swam for the first time. Can you remember the anxiety you felt and then the elation when at last you succeeded? When was the last time in your life you experienced that degree of elation? We are told that we need to seek before we can find and knock before the door will be opened. Everything has to begin with our taking a specific and positive action. God does not respond until we initiate the action as we can so easily see in the scripture stories we just heard. As best I can tell, Jesus does not single out people who he wants to heal. Every time it is the person who needs healing who seeks out Jesus.

Now if what I am saying is an accurate interpretation of what Jesus actually says and does as reported in the Bible, then it seems to me that we have to ask ourselves why we are not seeking Jesus' help. Is it because we can not see a physical Jesus? Are we just like Thomas when he said to his friends that unless he saw Jesus in person he would not believe? We say that Jesus lives but then we fail to act upon that belief. Perhaps we are like those who shouted at Jesus on the cross claiming that if he would come down from the cross they would believe. Are you waiting for some specific and physical sign? This is what Jesus means when he says it is our faith that heals. There are surveys that indicate that a very large percentage of ministers have lost their faith and if that is accurate it is quite reasonable to see how very difficult taking this leap of faith really is.

Leap of faith is an expression we have all heard and my belief is that it really does take a leap. Think about what a leap entails. There is no turning back from a leap. Once you have initiated a leap you are committed. How many times have you hesitated on a boat before jumping into the water? Once you decide to leap you are going to get wet no matter how cold the water might actually be. You know how those who have already jumped in will tell you how warm the water is regardless of the temperature. Committed to Jesus, now there is something for us all to contemplate. What does the word committed mean to you? If you were to make a list of those things and people you are committed to how many would be on that list and where would Jesus' name be on that list? This is not a trick question. Who would you be willing to show your list to? The people in our scripture readings all had to be very public in their belief that Jesus could indeed heal them. Their requests were not done quietly in private but out loud before many who obviously did not believe.

We face the same risk when we proclaim our belief in a living Jesus who actually has power. If you pray to a dead God who is distant and who does not really know you, what hope can you have that your prayers will be heard never mind answered? In the hymn, His eyes are on the sparrow, we sing, "and I know he watches me." Do you accept the fact that you are being watched or do you think that these are just words that have little meaning in this real world? How could a God who loves us allow so many bad things to happen to so many? Even more to the point, why does a God who loves us allow all this to happen?

The best reason I have been able to come up with is that if direct rewards were given out for good behavior then the most intelligent people would be the best behaved. Why,

because they would quickly recognize how their behavior was being rewarded and would merely continue to behave in that manner. However, we all know from personal observation that worldly rewards are achieved by really bad people. The good people do not always win, at least as we are tempted to judge success. Last week I talked about the need to measure results rather than activity and today we are challenged by the need to decide publicly just exactly what we most desire. Who is willing to stand up right now and tell Jesus what you want?

When I was writing this I wondered if anyone would actually know what to ask for in this semi-public setting. Yet we are a covenanted congregation who have pledged before God to support each other. Also, I was wondering what I would ask for and how I would actually phrase the request. What response would I expect to receive and what might be a proper time frame for my request to be answered. Each Sunday we pray for people by name and we also pray for others who remain unnamed and for ourselves. When you pray what result is it you are seeking? How do you measure the results of your prayers? Are your prayers being answered? These are questions that may prove to be too difficult to answer honestly without giving the matter a great deal of soul searching.

Let us think about the disciples who were observing all these healing miracles over an extended number of years. To the best of my knowledge we are not told about any personal healing requests that they made. They must have been tempted many times, particularly after Jesus turned the water into wine. Why not ask Jesus to provide their wine and food so they did not have to be bothered by having to purchase wine and food? I believe we need to think long and hard about what we really want God to provide to us while we are living here on earth.

Let us pray. God, we pray that you will open our minds to the reality of your presence in our lives. Help us to realize you are a God who loves us and knows our every fault. We may be stuck in a comfort zone where your daily presence is not always acknowledged. At times you may not be at the center of our thinking and we may say and do things we regret. We pray this morning for the courage to take that leap of faith that will change our lives. Once again we thank you for the Good News of your love. In Jesus' name we pray.  
AMEN