

What do you want? That is a question that operates with great power in the background of our lives. We want more money, because bills pile up and security feels just out of reach. We want to look better, to feel confident in our own skin and avoid the judgment that comes with not measuring up. We want to be popular, to belong, to have people like us and notice us. We want success—whether that's a promotion, a winning game, or simply being seen as someone who's got it together.

Whatever your desires might be, they are important drivers of your life. They set the course for efforts and investments. The desires aren't always fulfilled. Sometimes we set them aside as being too hard, but the ache doesn't go away. "What do you want?" is important for either happiness and fulfillment on the one hand or sadness and disappointment on the other.

There were a few times when Jesus said, "**What do you want?**" to people he met. John's Gospel tells us that this was the first question he asked his very first disciples. They were disciples of John the Baptist before they were disciples of Jesus. When John the Baptist pointed at Jesus and said, "**Behold, the Lamb of God,**" two of them started to follow Jesus. He turned and asked them, "**What do you want?**" Did they know what they wanted? They responded: "**Rabbi (which means teacher), where are you staying?**" Jesus said, "**Come and you will see.**"

Jesus did not disappoint! This is one way to understand Jesus's work as the Christ: He fulfilled people's desires. One time there was a blind man. Jesus said, "**What do you want?**" "I want to see." Jesus gave him sight. He cast out demons, healed the sick, raised the dead. What tremendous power!

That is the kingdom of God with Jesus as king. We speak of "Good News" or the "Gospel." The good news is that God is at work in his kingdom. Jesus gives people what they want. He gives them more than they could expect or hope for. He does not disappoint.

Or does he? Some of you might be wondering. Where's the money? Where's the hot bod? Where's the popularity and success? Where, even, are those miracles that get talked about in the Bible?

These questions are understandable. Even Jesus's first disciples might have had them. Why didn't Jesus make his power and glory known? Why didn't he rule in such a way that they could enjoy positions of power? Peter, with his sword, might have thought that if he tried hard enough Jesus wouldn't be crucified and would reign without suffering instead.

But if these first disciples ever did think like that, at some point they changed their minds. Otherwise they wouldn't have continued to be his disciples after his crucifixion or the ascension. But, if anything, they had *more* fervor and courage *after* his ascension. Many of them preferred to die rather than forego the pleasure of persuading others that Jesus is the Christ. They believed that the kingdom of God would satisfy all of their desires, as well as the desires of those whom they convinced. They believed to the end; some of them having painful and humiliating deaths.

So we must not think that we, with our doubts, are different than the first disciples. Nor is it the case that these early disciples were loaded with miracles but somehow the power of the Holy Spirit petered out until we've come to our time. Already at the time of the apostles, Christians knew that by believing

in Christ they were not signing up for a program that gave them unlimited power, pleasure, and success. If anything, it's almost the opposite.

There are good reasons for this. Power, when used wrongly, is horrible and destructive. Power can be used in service to self-interest, oppressing others, ignoring accountability, and violating justice. Pleasure can turn us into hogs. Even the business gurus will tell you that failures are much more powerful than successes. The superficial desires we all naturally have are not the best things. They might even be evil.

Jesus, with his kingdom, opens up new possibilities for disciples. The Holy Spirit works new desires, strange ambitions you might say, that we might not even think of otherwise because of our innate selfishness. Try these ambitions on for size: "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." We might sum all these up with the word: "Righteousness." To be righteous is to be life-promoting and life-protecting. To be righteous is to be like our Father in heaven. To be like him is more precious than gold, and sweeter than the honey of a honeycomb.

So what do you want? You might think you know what you want, but maybe we need what Jesus said to those first disciples: "Come and I will show you." Our usual desires aren't good enough. If they were fulfilled to the extent we would like they wouldn't be good for others nor for ourselves. Our desires must be awakened to higher and glorious things like the fruit of the Spirit. Then those natural ambitions will no longer be so damaging to others or dangerous to our souls. Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you."

Jesus will fulfill all our desires. That is what he does. The Good News from God is not that we should manage our expectations. He will open us up to new, holy desires. It's okay even to have those natural, superficial desires so long as we do not insist upon them, but are willing to deny ourselves and be obedient to Jesus. Whatever is good in any of our desires Jesus will by no means cast away, even as he forgives and purifies whatever is evil. This is true of even the most powerful of desires that easily get the best of us. Desires such as anger or lust need redemption and renewal not denial. God takes up what is in us as he molds and forms us into his sons and daughters. One day we will be glorious, but not in such a way that is ugly or self-serving. As the Psalmist says, "We will look to him and be radiant."

The Gospel truly is good news. None of our desires that are worth anything will go unfulfilled. The worst case scenario is that we must wait for the renewal and purification and glorification that will happen at the resurrection of the dead. In the meantime our Lord cleanses us and prepares us for the weight of that glory. So we should not be down in the mouth about the kingdom of God. Jesus being the king is the best news there is, because he wins. He does all things well.

In our Gospel reading you heard how Jesus sent out 72. Jesus gave them instructions, some of which were particular to that time. However, the link between their time and our time is in the main message they were commanded to speak: "The kingdom of God has come near to you." How did the kingdom of God come near? They told people that Jesus is the king in whom they should believe. They told people that Jesus would give them happiness and peace. They told them that Jesus would fulfill all their desires—if not immediately, then when the time was right. Some believed; some didn't.

Today is not different. The driving force of the Christian Church is and always will be the Gospel, the good news, that Jesus is king. We've banded together as a congregation to make this message known to ourselves, to our children, and to our community, but the kingdom of God is not limited to this building or to the ministrations of pastors. **The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.** This means that you, just like me or any other Christian, are fully equipped to speak the good news. What better news could there be than that Jesus will fulfill all your desires? Some will believe. Some won't.

Regardless, whether you are "successful" or "unsuccessful," do not rejoice in that. As Jesus said, **"Rejoice that your name has been written in heaven."** Rejoice that God has found you to tell you the good news that he is yours and you are his. Nothing good will be lost, and nothing bad will endure forever. This is the hope that sustains believers, so that we can endure what comes upon us with courage and good cheer. Rejoice that Jesus Christ is your Lord! Amen.

