

In the Name of the loving, life-giving, and liberating God, who is blessed Trinity.

When I was little, I remember getting catalogs from stores advertising all their Christmas sales and products. My two younger brothers and I would spend hours looking through them and circling the things we wanted. We would never get even half of what we circled, understandably. We haven't reached this stage with Julian yet, but I know that, as kids, my brothers and I circled way more than any parent could ever hope to afford. But... whether we got what we circled didn't actually matter all that much. We'd get a few things we wanted, and Christmas was always enough. But that early part—circling what we wanted—was always magical, regardless of what we got on Christmas. It was a time to simply dream about what could be.

The disciples are given license to dream in our reading today. It starts with something of a demand. James and John come up to Jesus and say, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” It sounds something like a child asking for toys for Christmas, ready to ask for anything and everything.

I know that as I got older, my Christmas lists got a little more practical. I didn't dream quite so big. We all adjust our expectations as we grow older. The things we want change, and we become less and less likely to do anything like James and John, simply walking up and saying, “Give us what we ask.”

But Jesus is game. He tells them, “What is it you want me to do for you?” We could hear this simply as expert-level parenting—Jesus giving himself an out in case they ask for something they can't have—and he does use it this way in this instance. James and John ask for positions of power beside a Messiah who, they think, will soon overthrow their Roman oppressors.

Jesus can't give them that because his disciples have once again missed the point. Right before this reading, there are two verses we skip, in which Jesus tells them that as the Messiah, he is walking a road that leads to suffering and death. This is the third time Jesus has told his disciples what he has been called to do, and the third time that the disciples haven't been able to fit it into their narrative of what the Messiah is meant to do. So, they fall back on the stories that make sense—stories that will place them in power right alongside this triumphant Messiah they imagine.

And yet... listening to Jesus' question, I also hear hope. “What is it that you want me to do for you?” There is hope that they might dream a little bigger, a little broader... hope that they might look beyond themselves to the world around them, to see what Jesus is actually trying to do in the world.

I have been in church my whole life. I was baptized Lutheran, grew up United Methodist, became a Baptist in Seminary, and then finally found the Episcopal Church, my own spiritual home. There was never a time when I did not like being in church. Why? Who knows? If I knew that, we'd have a lot less anxiety about attendance at church. My two brothers' stories are a little different from mine despite being raised in the same household. All I can say is that church fed me in the way I needed it to. I found family in the church, and thankfully, my faith grew as I grew—it broadened and filled out, and when my peers left church, I found something deeper.

We all, eventually, grow past our childhood dreams, those times when we would circle the things we want out of life in store catalogs. Jesus' question, “What is it you want me to do for you?”

opens the door of possibility wide, inviting us to dream bigger, to dream of a world that is made right—not just for me and you, but for everyone. A world where justice flows down like a mighty river and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Can you imagine?

Jesus did not come to overthrow Rome because that was too small a dream. There was more that needed doing. As Jesus walked the road to the cross, he was surely thinking of every person he had sat at a table and eaten with, every sick person made whole, every life restored to community, every person who ever would be ushered into the justice of God, and the world that would one day feast at this table of God together. God's dream was bigger than any of the disciples could have imagined.

As I come to Christ & Grace as your new Rector, it is too small a dream just to think of what Christ & Grace might become. Jesus invites us not only into wholeness ourselves—and it is very true that God's dream involves our flourishing—but also into a community of wholeness. We can only flourish as much as the person beside us. The Kingdom of God, the justice of God, invites us to dream for ourselves and beyond ourselves. And I know that God is not alone in that dream, that you have dreams for this community of Petersburg, that you want your friends and neighbors to flourish even as you grow and flourish. That is God's dream that we are chasing here in church. That is why we come Sunday after Sunday, because we believe in a God who wants more for this world and all of the people in it.

So, Christ & Grace, Jesus is asking us, "What do you want for me to do for you?" How will we reply?