

drink?" (Matthew 20:22). Jesus' question exposed their lack of understanding about what the coming of God's kingdom was actually going to be like.

As we walk with Jesus in our own desires, we learn how to be gentle, trustworthy and compassionate companions for each other. We discover that opening up our desire in Christ's presence and in the presence of spiritual companions – even when we're not sure what is true and what is false within us – can foster a new kind of intimacy between us that is oddly satisfying.

As we pay attention to our desires, we are made aware that there are choices for us to make. Jesus' question to the paralyzed man at the pool of Beth-zatha, *"Do you want to be made well?"* (John 5:6), called for him to take some sort of movement in the direction of his desire. Paul is referring to when he says that we must work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). He is referring to the fact that there is always God's part and ours on the journey of transformation, which is something we are always discerning.

The first thing we do with our desire is to get in touch with it and open it up to God, listening for what God has to say to us in the midst of it. We learn to trust that God has plans for us. Then, in company with our spiritual companions, we pay attention to the ways God is inviting us to live and make decisions that are consistent with the true desires he has placed within us. Becoming a transforming community means we will need to develop a greater capacity to relinquish control to God – control of both our own lives and the lives of others. We will have to learn to wait with each other in that place of not knowing, alert for glimpses of God's guidance and committed to taking courageous action when that guidance is given.

We will refrain from trying to fix each other or offering easy, un insightful responses as we each get in touch with our desires and face the risky invitations of God in the midst of our desires. This is what the community of Jesus is all about. Waiting on Jesus. Together. For each other.

March 25, 2018
LIFE TOGETHER IN CHRIST (4)
But We Had Hoped
Luke 24:21, Mark 10:46-52
Rev. Dr. Charles Yoon

What were your hopes and dreams in your childhood? What did you want to be when you became an adult? Most popular future dream occupations were President, army general, CEO, police officer, doctor, professor, teacher, engineer, soccer player, ... Least popular future dream occupations were pastor, farmer, singer, actor/actress, entertainer. But singer, actor/actress, and entertainer are the most want to be jobs for young folks today. We had no idea of computer engineering or the IT area at that time. Even though we didn't have any specific path or vision, we had desires and hopes for the future. But, as we grew or as our society changed, our desires and hopes changed. There are many detours and sometimes dead ends which lead our hopes and dreams in different directions on our life journey.

Today, we find the two disciples' desires and hopes detoured in their distressing phrase – *"but we had hoped."* (21) Over time that desire had blossomed into real hope. They had allowed themselves to hope for what was really going to happen. They had rearranged their lives and taken great risks in order to live in their desire for a new kind of kingdom. They had been so convinced that Jesus was indeed the Messiah who would guide them in this new regime that they had staked their very lives on it.

At the same time, they seemed to be confused about exactly how this kingdom would come. They expected that Jesus was going to set up this new kingdom through some sort of military coup, not through an approach to power that involved death, burial and resurrection! They shared desire for this new kingdom and they believed that Jesus could bring about the fulfillment of their deepest desire. So they had left their homes to follow their desires and hopes.

When we get in touch with something we really want, we let it matter to us a great deal. As our desire becomes more and more real, it becomes more than just a dream. We can actually picture it, and we

find ourselves leaning in and living as though that thing might really happen. Jesus understood this. He knew that if people get in touch with their true spiritual desires, it would change their lives. So he encouraged them to pay attention to their desire and then actually speak of it out loud in his presence. When two disciples of John started to follow Jesus, he turned to them and said, *“What are you looking for?”* (John 1:38). When Bartimaeus cried out to Jesus from the side of the Jericho road, Jesus asked, *“What do you want me to do for you?”* (Mark 10:51). When James and John marched into Jesus’ presence announcing, *“We want you to do for us whatever we ask of you,”* Jesus graciously responded, *“What is it you want me to do for you?”* (Mark 10:35-36).

As we get in touch with our truest longings and desires, we need a community that can listen to our desires and support us. In this community we choose practices and life rhythms – intimacy with God, deeper levels of transformation in God’s presence, soul friendship and connection with others, and the freedom and courage to offer the gifts to the world.

During my ministry at Prophetstown UMC, we started a small group ministry. We started off with three small groups and the small group ministry became an important means of grace, connecting each other’s lives and helping them to experience God’s presence in their own lives. One of the small group members later confessed that even though she had known her friends in her small group for a long time, she really got to know the members as they gathered together and shared their stories in her small group.

At Crystal Lake UMC, we launched the Stephen Ministry which is a one-on-one caring ministry. God gave me a vision for this ministry, so I had one week of training to become a Stephen Leader. But, I realized that this ministry was too big to start by myself. I asked two wonderful and faithful members to train for Stephen Leaders for this ministry. Finally, after 50 hours of Stephen Minister’s training, we started a one-on-one caring ministry. It was a life-changing ministry for both the care-giver (Stephen Minister) and for the care-receiver, experiencing God’s presence during their conversations at meetings. I think our Wednesday morning Bible study is also a place to experience God’s presence during sharing our stories and lives. Thomas Merton says, “Ask me not where I

live or what I like to eat ... ask me what I think I am living for, in detail, and ask me what I think is keeping me from living fully for the thing I want to live for.” (*My Argument with the Gestapo*, pp 160-61)

Have you ever thought about the fact that your desires – for deeper union with God, for love, for belonging, for transformation – is the truest thing about you? We tend to over-identify with external aspects of ourselves, such as our giftedness or our woundedness, our personal type, our job or our title, our successes or failures, our identity as husband or wife, mother or father. We think that these aspects of ourselves somehow define us. But in reality, our desire for God and our capacity to reach for more of God is the most essential aspect of who we are. Compassions in transforming communities are increasingly able to see what is truest and most essential in us and call us to it over time. Shared desires to be transformed in and through Christ’s presence is the essence of transforming communities.

In fact, it is not always comfortable to acknowledge our desires. Desire can feel a little out of control. Only God knows where our honest admissions about desire will take us, and sometimes we will be called upon to own our deeper spiritual desires without knowing what the outcome will be.

When Jesus asked blind Bartimaeus, *“What do you want me to do for you?”* he responded immediately with *“My teacher, let me see again”* (Mark 10:51). And Jesus healed him right away. This is one possible outcome; at any moment God can change, heal, restore – whatever needs to be done. But another outcome for the blind man was that after his healing, the life he had as a beggar no longer fit; he couldn’t make a living as a beggar when he was healthy and able-bodied! So, he got up and followed Jesus on the way. What had worked for him in the past no longer worked, so he had to open himself up to the unknown and follow Jesus very closely, letting things unfold without knowing what the outcome would be.

When James and John answered Jesus’ question about desire by demanding positions of prominence in his kingdom, Jesus followed up with a comment and another question. He replied, *“You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to*