



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for October 17, 2021
“Storyline: Zacchaeus”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Luke 19:1-10

A Wee Little Man

You know the song:

*Zacchaeus was a wee little man, and a wee little man was he,
He climbed up in a sycamore tree, for the Lord he wanted to see.
And as the Savior passed that way, he looked up in that tree,
And he said, “Zacchaeus, you come down!” For I am going to your home today!”*

And that’s exactly what Jesus did that day.

Clement of Alexandria once wrote that Zacchaeus left being a tax collector and later became Bishop of Caesarea. While we don’t know for sure, it could very well be. We do know that something dramatic happened in Zacchaeus’ life. Upon meeting Jesus his life was forever changed.

We hear about that today as we study Luke 19:1-10. Hear this reading of Jesus’ encounter with Zacchaeus. Again, from Luke 19:1-10.

Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short, he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.”

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

On Being Short

Being short has its challenges. It sometimes makes it tough changing lightbulbs. It's not always easy reaching things on the top shelf. It can sometimes make it hard to watch a parade as it goes by. It certainly is a disadvantage in basketball.

As our grandchildren grow, I have noticed how interested they are in their height. Cheryl and I will mark their height with a date every three months or so on the back of our pantry door. They are taken with their growth and are proud of their progress.

One day that growth will slow up. I have this feeling that a couple of them will be pretty tall and the others more my height, a bit on the shorter side.

Those who are shorter really do have to adjust and adapt to their circumstance. That was clearly the case for Zacchaeus, the "*wee little man*." The scripture tells us that Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus as he made his way through Jericho. Because he was short, he could not see over the crowd. Not to be denied, he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree.

I remember visiting Old Jericho when Cheryl and I visited the Holy Land a few years back and seeing what is call the Zacchaeus Tree. Whether that tree is the one Zacchaeus climbed is immaterial. The fact that he climbed a tree just like the one in Old Jericho shows his deep desire to see Jesus.

Maybe he climbed that tree simply out of curiosity. Maybe his reason was much deeper. There very well may have been a deep spiritual longing that he felt only Jesus could fill.

Interestingly, Jesus knew that. He knew that Zacchaeus was "*a field ripe for the harvest*." Jesus knew that Zacchaeus was not just primed to hear his call but to respond to that call. As we know from scripture Jesus looked up into that tree and called Zacchaeus by name.

Jesus is calling your name as well.

A Little Background

Let's pause to consider a little background here. Zacchaeus was a tax collector. That made him one of the most despised men in town. Zacchaeus would have been seen as a traitor, sold out to the Romans.

"*Taxes, taxes, taxes*," we're hearing a lot about taxes these days. We fear they are going to go up.

In Zacchaeus' day taxes were always going up. There were specific reasons for that. In those days, a tax collector was required by Rome to collect a certain amount but after that was collected was given license to collect even more. It was a system that left a lot of room for corruption.

Undoubtedly, Zacchaeus had profited from that and had become quite wealthy in the process. It could very well be that all of that had begun to wear on Zacchaeus. He may have felt guilty that all his riches were at the expense of others. It may have been that that even though he was wealthy, he still felt empty on the inside.

Jesus knew all about that. He asks in Mark 6:36, *“What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?”*

Call

As we said just a second ago Jesus called Zacchaeus by name. It’s quite something that Jesus called Zacchaeus by name. He knows us through and through, even better than we know ourselves.

Jesus has this innate ability to seek us out. That has everything to do with the grace he extends our way. We call it, prevenient grace. God seeking us, wooing us, if you will, until that time when we finally accept.

In Zacchaeus’ case, Jesus was ready to even shake the trees to get Zacchaeus to budge. *“Zacchaeus,”* said Jesus, *“come down immediately. I must stay at your house today. So, Zacchaeus came down at once and welcomed him.”*

Jesus didn’t give Zacchaeus much time to think about. *“Immediately,”* he said. There is no time like the present when it comes to heading Christ’s call upon our lives.

Response

Zacchaeus’ response is quite telling. He recognized Jesus for who he was. He called him, *“Lord.”* That’s exactly how Saul responded on the Damascus Road.

Zacchaeus was ready to respond. He was ready to make things right. Zacchaeus was ready to give away half his riches to the poor, and as if that wasn’t enough, he was ready to repay four-fold to anyone he had defrauded. If you do the math that would have left him precious little.

Hear this: Zacchaeus’ encounter with Jesus gave this small man a big heart. That’s true for all who give their lives to Jesus.

Kid’s Kloset

You are probably aware that we have some folk around here who have some really big hearts. They too are ready to give and give again. That’s particularly true for the number of volunteers who help with Kid’s Kloset. They have a passion to raise as much as they can for those who really need it. That passion is borne out their response to God’s call upon their lives.

Representing those who work so hard to make Kid’s Kloset such an effective ministry is Kellie Harrison. She comes now to share about that passion.

(Kellie Harrison)

Thanks Kellie, and thanks to everyone who are the hands and feet of Jesus through *Kids Kloset*. It’s great to hear this *Storyline* of God’s call upon your lives and how you have so marvelously responded.

The Power of Grace

Not to be lost in the story of Zacchaeus is the reaction of those who witnessed what Jesus did.

There were those who were there who began to murmur among themselves about how unbecoming it was for Jesus to be the guest of a sinner. Lost in their own self-righteousness, they just couldn't understand why Jesus would do such a thing.

Jesus would not be deterred. His every desire was to “*seek and save the lost.*” That's just what grace does. It seeks out those who need it the most and works to convict those who think they need it the least.

I like this from author and preacher, King Duncan. He writes, “*Grace is always controversial when lived out.*”

Grace has a way up unsettling the comfortable and confronting the self-righteous. Grace is able to transform the unacceptable, love the unlovable, and forgive the unforgiveable.

That was the case for Zacchaeus and certainly is the case for you and me.

If God's grace through Jesus Christ could transform a man as sleezy as Zacchaeus, it can certainly transform people like you and me—as sleezy as we can be sometimes.

The message is this: God's love is for all. It doesn't matter how tall or how short you are.