

31st Sunday C (Luke 19:1-10)

In today's Gospel, Luke tells us the engaging story of Zacchaeus and his life-changing encounter with Jesus. Just what do we know about Zacchaeus? We know that he was short in height, significant, since scripture rarely gives any physical description of Biblical characters. Even a physical description of Jesus is lacking. We don't know his height, his facial features, the color of his hair, the color of his eyes. So when the Bible records a physical description, we should pay attention.

Zacchaeus was short, or more politically correct, vertically challenged. Besides helping us understand why a grown man would climb a tree to see Jesus pass by, perhaps we can imagine what it must have been like for Zacchaeus as he grew up. Perhaps he was pushed around by big bullies, made fun of, always shorter than the girls he liked, living in a world of giants. To compensate for short stature, he may have tried other means to have others look up to him.

We also know that Zacchaeus was very rich. He was a chief tax collector, a man who traded everything and everybody that should have been sacred to him for an extra shekel. He was the town's chief sinner according to every religious, political, or polite standard one could imagine. Luke's gospel has story after story where the rich man ends up badly. But then, just when we are tempted to read Luke's account as the condemnation of all rich people, Zacchaeus- a sawed off shyster, a swindler, a crook, ends up at the table with the Lord Jesus, welcomed into the kingdom of God.

The point of the story about Zacchaeus, a man with so much baggage from the sins of others against him, and with his enormous baggage of sins he committed against others in return, if he can be redeemed, then anyone can be redeemed. Wealth, or its absence is not a predictor of spiritual status. The opinions of an entire village don't count as much as the opinion of God about us. Whatever one's past, no matter how heinous, there is always a possible new future with God's grace, if we will just accept the invitation of Christ.

Jesus said, to the surprise and disgust of the proper people of the town, "This one too is a child of Abraham." "Salvation has come to this house." "The Son of Man Has come to seek and to save what was lost."

And Jesus says that to each one of us, for he loves us with a passion. And his love was proved by his very passion and death- and resurrection. And we give joyful thanks as we gather at the table, remembering him in the Eucharist he left us.

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