

Twenty First Sunday After Pentecost - October 30, 2022, Year C

St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Associate Rector

Scripture: Luke 19:1-10

"Up A Tree"

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where it seems the whole town is standing between you and the show you are trying to see? I can remember when Marilyn and I went with my newly widowed sister Lee and her two children, Kerri Ann, and John Michael, to see the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade live and in person at the corner of 34th street and Broadway in New York City. It was packed with what seemed like wall-to-wall people. John was 3 years old and Kerri was 8. John could only see the backs of people, so I lifted him on my shoulders and suddenly he got to see things. It was freezing cold, but at least he could see. Have you ever lifted a youngster so that they could have a better vantage point of something? Have you ever stood on something for you to see better, or maybe to be seen?

In today's Holy Gospel from Luke, chapter 19, there is a little man who climbs up a sycamore tree to see Jesus, and it provides to us one of the most vivid short stories in the whole Bible. You know, I think many adults and children can identify with Zacchaeus, as like my nephew John, they often find themselves at the back of a crowd and can't see what's going on. Many adults, too, can identify with him because they might want to get closer to Jesus, but find it difficult or even embarrassing to do so, and find that it might even be pretty costly.

Luke's Gospel is the only one that tells of Zacchaeus and his sudden moment of glory, and this hardened old tax-collector shows us the problem of riches and what to do about it, how Jesus relates with 'sinners', and the faith which recognizes Jesus as Lord and discovers new life as the result. This account follows the sad tale of the rich young ruler in Luke chapter 18, and is preparing us before Jesus approaches Jerusalem for the final time. This is evidence of the kind of new life that Jesus has come to bring. If only people in Jerusalem could have seen that point and made a similar response!

Nobody in Jericho liked Zacchaeus and they would have been horrified to think that, of all the people of their town, he would be the one known by name to millions of people nearly two thousand years later. He was the kind of man, much like Matthew, that everybody despised. He was not only a tax-collector but he was a chief tax-collector; meaning that he made money on the side, in addition to his legitimate collections, and he made more money from the tax-collectors working under him. Wherever money changed hands, whether across a grubby table in a tin shack in a dusty small town or across a sparkling computer screen in a shiny office on in a big city skyscraper, the hands can all too easily get dirty. Whenever money starts to talk, it shouts louder than the claims of honesty, respect, and human dignity.

You can only imagine the reaction of his neighbors, and even friends and relatives in Jericho, as Zacchaeus's house became more lavishly decorated, and as he had many servants who would be doing his bidding. With so much money, which of course came from the people of Jericho, his clothes became finer, and you can imagine how his food became more extravagant. He

wanted for nothing, except more money, which in all reality – they felt that he had no right to, but there was nothing that the people could do about it.

Things were the same old, same old, until Jesus came to Jericho. Think about how Zacchaeus' inquisitiveness overtook him that da. Filled with questions he climbed a tree to find out more. Jesus saw straight through the layers of graft and greed, and of callous contempt for Zacchaeus' fellow-citizens. He had met enough tax-collectors already to know exactly what life was like for them, and how, even though they couldn't resist the chance to make more for themselves than they should, there was something at their very heart for which only He had the remedy. Things were about change. "*And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today."* (Luke 19:5 ESV)

And so Jesus finds Himself relaxing in the company of the wrong sort of people, and once again the crowd of people outside starts to grumble. But this time, instead of Jesus telling everyone a parable the tax-collector himself speaks to Jesus in public, and gives evidence of his repentance, and what he has done for restitution, saying: "*Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.*" (Luke 19:8 ESV)

Repentance here isn't just a change of heart, but repentance involves restoration, and making amends. Zacchaeus is determined to do so extravagantly. He doesn't offer to sell all his property, and Jesus does not demand it. But by the time he'd given half of it away, and made that fourfold restitution, where necessary, that might have left him in pretty seriously reduced financial circumstances. Zacchaeus doesn't care. He has found something far more valuable. '*I must stay at your house today*' becomes '*Today salvation has come to this house*'. Where Jesus is, there salvation can be found. For those who accept Jesus as Master, reordering and changing their lives accordingly, salvation can be found.

Jesus connects this former outcast of the mainstream of society back into the true family of Abraham. He says to Zacchaeus, "*Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.*" (Luke 19:9-10 ESV)

Zacchaeus isn't going to follow Jesus up the old Roman Road to Jerusalem, escaping the puzzled and probably still angry looks of his neighbors, the people of Jericho. He is going to live out his new life and try to re-establish himself as part of the renewed Israel right where he is. Jesus on the other hand is on His way to Jerusalem. The prophets have spoken of the fate that awaits the Son of Man; but Jesus' mission is not just to suffer and die, but rather to search out and rescue the lost sheep. Meeting Zacchaeus at the sycamore tree was searching for and spending time with a sinner. The neighbors grumbled that Jesus "*has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.*" (Luke 19:7 ESV) That could soon change to '*He has gone out to die with the thieves*'. Jesus Himself told Zacchaeus "*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.*" On behalf of us sinners, thank you Lord, that you did!