

“A Sinner Saved”  
Luke 19:1-10  
Sunday, October 31, 2010  
The Rev. Sharon Snapp-Kolas, preaching

Scripture. Prayer.

**Opening.**

Brett Blair tells this story: “A man on vacation was strolling along outside his hotel in Acapulco, enjoying the sunny Mexican weather. He heard the screams of a woman kneeling in front of a child. The man knew enough Spanish to determine that the boy had swallowed a coin. Seizing the child by the heels, the man held him up, gave him a few shakes, and a quarter dropped to the sidewalk. ‘Oh, thank you sir!’ cried the woman. ‘You seemed to know just how to get it out of him. Are you a doctor?’ ‘No, ma’am,’ replied the man. ‘I’m with the United States Internal Revenue Service.’”

Zacchaeus was a tax collector and a rich man, Luke tells us.

OK; here’s one more story to start us out, from Robert A. Beringer: “There was a little boy who got separated from his parents in a large shopping center. The Security Department quickly located the child, and took him to an office while the frantic parents were paged over the public address. One of the security guards got a large ice cream cone for the boy, so when his parents arrived at the office, there was their little son happily eating his ice cream. Suddenly, as his parents embraced him, the child burst into tears. One of the security guards said, ‘Gosh, I guess he didn’t know he was lost until he was found!’”

Beringer continues, “Jesus once met a man named Zacchaeus who was like that. Zacchaeus was a Jew but he worked for the Romans as a tax collector, and he was about as popular as folks today who work for the IRS! In those days tax collectors gathered their funds

with a little help from the Roman Army, and when Rome's needs were met, they could collect as much as their ingenuity permitted. Zacchaeus may have been small of stature, but he was a 'big man' among the tax collectors. In fact, he was a 'chief tax collector.' He had a big home in Jericho, a very comfortable life, and although he had more enemies than friends, Zacchaeus outwardly appeared very successful.”

And then he met Jesus. Let's take a moment to look at what Jesus does, and how Zacchaeus responds.

### **I. Jesus passes by.**

Jesus passes by – this is how the story begins. His intent is to pass through Jericho. He is focused on his destination: Jerusalem, and the cross. Jesus passes by.

Raymond Cannata, in his book, A Surprising Resolution, refers to C. S. Lewis. Cannata writes, “C.S. Lewis has this really helpful illustration. He says that in the incarnation, Jesus was like a diver. He is God in heaven looking down into this dark, slimy, murky water. That's our sinful, polluted world. God dives in, He gets himself wet. And then God came up again, dripping, but holding the precious thing he went down to recover. That precious thing was Zacchaeus, and you and me. All those sinners who have trusted in Christ. That's how we get out of the slime of tax collecting, or cheating, or lusting, or hating, or whatever other self-destructive sin we are buried in. God in Christ descended down into the slime and rescued us. Resolutions and vows to be better won't help by themselves. We don't have the power to keep them. We are stuck on the sea bottom. We have no power of our own to get up or out. All we can do is cry out for God's grace to lift us up, to rescue us.”

Zacchaeus, abandoning all thoughts of decorum and public image, runs – picks up the skirts of his robes, revealing his legs for all to see, and RUNS! RUNS! – to get ahead on the

route Jesus is taking. He runs ahead, short little man that he is, trying to see Jesus, suddenly desperate to find a way – ANY WAY! – to see Jesus.

Are you having trouble seeing Jesus today? Are there too many people and problems and barriers in your way? Are YOU too much in your way? Are you allowing too much YOU to keep you from running ahead, throwing caution to the wind, and doing whatever it takes to see Jesus?

**Run ahead! Climb a tree! – This is what we are to do when Jesus passes by.**

## **II. Jesus invites himself in.**

Jesus invites himself in – this is the next action Jesus takes in Luke’s narrative. Jesus looks up, sees a short little goofy guy clinging to the branches of a sycamore tree, and Jesus says, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.”

Jesus invites himself in...

Keith Wagner writes, in his book, Little Guy, Big Gift – (I love that title!) -- :

“One time a blind man was invited to attend the wedding of a friend. The couple had chosen to be married in a village church that was known for its picturesque qualities. As the couple left the chapel, the mother of the groom said to the blind man, ‘What a pity that you couldn’t see the chapel. It really is so lovely. And such a pretty garden.’ She later repeated this to some mutual friends at the reception. The blind man just shrugged his shoulders each time and changed the subject. He thought to himself, ‘Didn’t she hear the bells?’ For him, the bells that had rung before and after the ceremony had been magnificent. He was astonished at their tones and the patterns that they made. For him they had created an atmosphere of joy and sacredness. The blind man finally concluded that the mother of the groom may have seen the

lovely chapel but she missed the sound of the bells. With all her senses she had only experienced part of the beauty.”

Wagner goes on to comment on the scripture passage: “Zacchaeus was blinded by his selfishness, but that did not keep Jesus from seeing him as a whole person. Jesus wanted to stay with Zacchaeus. To miss this part of the story is to remain in the dark. Jesus had to go to his house because this represented what Jesus was all about; giving grace toward those who are lost. In the gospel of Luke, Zacchaeus became the symbolic recipient of the grace of God toward lost humanity. There is no limit to God’s grace. There is even hope for the greedy and powerful. By staying with Zacchaeus, Jesus demonstrated that the grace of God extends to everyone, especially the lost.”

Jesus’ intent is just to pass through Jericho. But seeing Zacchaeus balanced ridiculously on a tree branch above, Jesus calls out, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.”

Jesus “**must**” stay at Zacchaeus’ house. The reasons become clear later on in the story. Jesus states that he has come “to seek out and to save the lost.” Zacchaeus represents all the sinners in need of saving. Jesus **must** stay at his house, because this is the mission for which Jesus has come to earth, the reason – as C. S. Lewis puts it – for which he dives into the dark, slimy, murky water of our sinful, polluted world.

And what is Zacchaeus’ response? Zacchaeus is “happy to welcome him.” This is a statement of conversion.

**Welcome Jesus into your home! Welcome Jesus into your heart! – This is what we are to do when Jesus invites himself in.**

### **III. Jesus declares the sinner saved.**

Finally, in Luke's description of events, Jesus declares the sinner saved. He says to Zacchaeus and to the assembled crowd, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

Jesus declares the sinner saved.

Robert A. Beringer, in his book, Turning Points, writes: "There is an old legend that says Zacchaeus went every day outside the city of Jericho carrying a bucket of water. One day, his wife followed him, wondering what this daily ritual was all about. She saw him stop at a certain sycamore tree. Zacchaeus poured his bucket of water on the tree's thirsty roots, and then stood there reverently looking up into the tree. It was a sacred place, for it was the place where his life was changed.

"But unfortunately a lot of Christians stop growing right there! They can tell you the day and the hour they first met Jesus Christ, but they have never taken this final step of letting the Living Christ rearrange the priorities of their lives. Zacchaeus was ready to let Christ be the very center of his life. He was ready to let Christ send him back out into the world to continue our Lord's ministry of justice and compassion. Religion for Zacchaeus would never be just another department in his life. His faith was now central to his whole being."

Jesus saves Zacchaeus – yes! – and his life is changed forever. His life is changed immediately. The crowd grumbles: "[Jesus] has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner," they complain!

Zacchaeus, a sinner now saved, stands and makes a promise to Jesus: "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much."

Only then does Jesus declare him saved. Reparations are a part of the equation. Salvation is not based on works. But Jesus expects his children to do good works, out of gratitude for the grace we have received. A more familiar phrase is to “make amends.” As saved sinners we are to make amends to those we have wronged, as much as possible.

**Make amends where possible. – This is what we are to do when Jesus declares us to be sinners saved.**

**Closing.**

To sum up the process of salvation, Zacchaeus style:

First of all, Jesus passes by. In response, we run ahead with abandon and climb a tree, in order to see Him!

Secondly, Jesus invites himself in. In response, we welcome Him into our homes; we welcome Him into our hearts. And we are **happy** to welcome Him. **Joyful**, even.

Finally, Jesus declares the sinner saved. In response, we make amends, where possible, to all we have wronged.

I close with this story, as told by James W. Moore: “One of the most famous composers had a rebellious son who used to come in late at night after his mother and father had gone to bed. And before going to his own room, this rebellious son would go to his father’s piano and slowly, spitefully... and loudly would play a simple scale, all but the final note. He would play, “Do-Re-Mi-Fa-Sol-La-Ti...” and then he wouldn’t strike that final “Do.” Leaving the scale unfinished, he would retire to his room.

“Meanwhile, his father (great musician that he was), hearing the scale minus the final note,... would twist and turn and writhe on his bed, his mind unable to relax because the scale was not finished.

“Finally, not able to stand it any longer, the father would crawl out of bed, stumble down the stairs and strike that final note of the scale. [“Do.” (Moore doesn’t include the final note in his story, but I have to sing it or it will drive me crazy!)] Only then could he relax and be at peace.

“Now,” continues Moore, “that’s an interesting parable because it reminds me of the way we so often treat God. We play around with some of the notes of faith, but we don’t play the full scale...

- We forgive, but not completely.
- We love, but not completely.
- We serve, but not completely.
- We accept Christ, but not completely.
- We live the Christian life-style but not completely.
- We commit our lives to God, but not completely.

“But then, even when we treat God shabbily, in his infinite patience and amazing grace, he continues to reach out to us and he continues to love us.”

As Sinners Saved, may we forgive one another when we play with less than a full scale. And may we respond with faithfulness to a God who loves us, and who urges us to sing more of the notes.

Amen.