

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Luke 19:1-10

Luke 19:1-10: 1-4 Then Jesus entered and walked through Jericho. There was a man there, his name Zacchaeus, the head tax man and quite rich. He wanted desperately to see Jesus, but the crowd was in his way—he was a short man and couldn't see over the crowd. So, he ran on ahead and climbed up in a sycamore tree so he could see Jesus when he came by.

5-7 When Jesus got to the tree, he looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, hurry down. Today is my day to be a guest in your home." Zacchaeus scrambled out of the tree, hardly believing his good luck, delighted to take Jesus home with him. Everyone who saw the incident was indignant and grumped, "What business does he have getting cozy with this crook?"

8 Zacchaeus just stood there, a little stunned. He stammered apologetically, "Master, I give away half my income to the poor—and if I'm caught cheating, I pay four times the damages."

9-10 Jesus said, "Today is salvation day in this home! Here he is: Zacchaeus, son of Abraham! For the Son of Man came to find and restore the lost."

A woman's husband had been slipping in and out of a coma for several months, yet she had stayed by his bedside every single day. One day, when he came to, he motioned for her to come nearer.

As she sat by him, he whispered, eyes full of tears, "You know what? You have been with me all through the bad times. When I got fired, you were there to support me. When my business failed, you were there. When I got shot, you were by my side. When we lost the house, you stayed right here. When my health started failing, you were still by my side. You know what?"

"What dear?" She gently asked, smiling as her heart began to fill with warmth.

"I think you're bad luck."

Wow! Was this wife actually bad luck? Luck by definition means to "have success or failure apparently brought by chance rather than through one's own actions." According to this definition, I wouldn't be so quick to blame her for all of his troubles. When we read the story of Zacchaeus, we might conclude from a Christian perspective that he had a lucky day the day Jesus came to town. Let's take a closer look at the story.

The first thing we learn is that Jesus was passing through the city of Jericho, heading towards Jerusalem, where, Jesus told the disciples, he would be killed. Just outside of Jericho, Jesus healed a blind beggar. If the crowd around Jesus at that moment had their way, the beggar never would have had the opportunity given to him to be healed by Jesus. When the blind man found out from a few in the crowd that Jesus was passing by, he began shouting out to Jesus. The crowd tried to shush him, but he persisted. Jesus heard him and asked what the beggar wanted. The beggar said he wanted to be healed, and Jesus healed him. Those in the crowd saw Jesus heal the blind beggar and began praising God.

So, when Jesus entered Jericho and the word was buzzing around about what Jesus did for the blind beggar, a crowd of people swarmed around Jesus as he was making his way through Jericho.

Zacchaeus obviously knew something about Jesus, too. We don't know what he knew about Jesus, but perhaps he had heard about the healing; or perhaps, he knew more of the Jesus story. All we know is that he wanted to see Jesus.

We learned at the beginning of this story that Zacchaeus was a tax-collector and he was rich. As I mentioned last week, when I preached about another story involving a tax-collector,

men in that profession were not at all popular. They were Jews by birth who chose to work for Rome and were, therefore, considered traitors.

Zacchaeus had another strike against him in that he was more than just the everyday tax-collector; he was the chief tax-collector. In the original Greek, the words *hapax legomenon* are used to describe Zacchaeus' job, and they are not used anywhere else in the existing Greek literature. Therefore, the meaning of it is unclear. Bible scholars think it may refer to someone who "bought" the local taxation rights from the Roman government. So, it is possible that he may have had a contract with the government and hired other tax collectors to work for him, probably making him richer than any of the regular tax collectors. I guess you could say that as much as the other tax collectors were hated, Zacchaeus was hated even more.

That was one strike Zacchaeus had against him. Another problem he had was that he was a short man. Even so, he braved coming out to gather with the crowd to see Jesus. I say he braved coming out because it's likely plenty of those in the crowd would have found pleasure in spitting on him, or kicking him, even tripping him, anything to make his outing miserable and show their anger against him. And no one was ready to allow him to move to the front to see Jesus.

But Zacchaeus was determined to see Jesus. As the story goes, he ran ahead of the crowd and climbed up a tree—most likely a fig-mulberry tree and not a sycamore tree. With its short trunk and its wide lateral branches, it would have been easy to climb. Imagine the humiliation of having to climb a tree because no one would give way for Zacchaeus to see Jesus. Yet, Zacchaeus was not to be denied.

Then as Jesus approached, he looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." Ok, so the first obvious question here is, how did Jesus know Zacchaeus' name. Secondly why did Jesus say, "he MUST" stay at Zacchaeus' house, and he must do it "today". Wasn't Jesus just passing through Jericho?

Once again, if we turn back to the original Greek, we find that the words translated into "must" and "today," actually carry with them a richer meaning of divine urgency. The same kind of divine urgency Jesus felt when his parents found him in the temple when he was twelve, and he told them that he must be in his Father's house.

So even though we might think Zacchaeus was lucky. In fact, the Message translation says, "Zacchaeus scrambled out of the tree, hardly believing his good luck," but his encounter was anything but luck. This was a God moment! Zacchaeus was determined to see Jesus, and Jesus wanted to see Zacchaeus. It didn't matter to Jesus what the crowd thought of Zacchaeus. In true Jesus fashion, he loved even those despised by society.

Every day we have opportunities to see Jesus, maybe not in the same way Zacchaeus saw him, but we see him as his Spirit moves around and within us. Do we look for him? Maybe the odds aren't always with us because obstacles get in the way. It's hard sometimes to see past our worries. Time becomes a hindrance when we get too busy. Like the crowd around Zacchaeus, there are all kinds of obstacles that can keep us from seeing Jesus.

Do we have the same determination as Zacchaeus to look for Jesus? Are we looking for the right thing when we look for Jesus in our lives? Are we looking for something big to happen? We learn from Zacchaeus' story, that he wasn't looking for anything special to happen. He just wanted to see Jesus, and, in this case, look what happened. I think sometimes we think if it's not big, it's not Jesus.

Or, is it possible that we don't look for Jesus because we are afraid of what he might ask us to do? I've been in those shoes. I remember the day I received a phone call from the District

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Executive of your district, inviting me to interview for a position as Minister of Christian Nurture at Westminster. It was the day after we had buried my sister-in-law who died of breast cancer. I said no. I didn't want to leave Lancaster County. Besides, the timing to move seemed all wrong. I didn't want to see Jesus in that call. I was asked to think about it and pray about it.

Don and I talked about it and decided that if we wanted to discern whether God was really calling us to do this, we needed to go to the interview. What would it hurt? We always had the option to say we were not interested. So, we went to the interview fully expecting to decline.

But we saw Jesus in the room that night. Our drive home to Lititz was a long quiet drive because we knew we were being called by God to move to Westminster. We went, and many times over, that call was confirmed. Yes, sometimes when we see Jesus, he does have something in mind for us to do; but not always. I really do think that sometimes we don't want to see Jesus because we're afraid of what he might expect from us; and that's unfortunate. Jesus is not always trying to get something out of us. Sometimes he just wants to love us.

Jesus really did not ask anything of Zacchaeus, except to take him home. He didn't even tell Zacchaeus that he needed to repent, which is what we might expect Jesus to do since Zacchaeus was a tax collector. Often times, this story is preached as a conversion lesson. In fact, different Bible translations actually present it as such.

If you read verse 8 in different translations, you will find some translate Zacchaeus' words about making financial amends above and beyond what was necessary with those he took advantage of in the future tense. In other translations, his words are in the present tense. The New Revised Standard version, which we read this morning, translates it in the future tense, while the Revised Standard version has it in the present tense. I dug out my Greek bible which puts his words in the present tense. So, when Jesus went home with Zacchaeus, Zacchaeus had already changed his ways, and Jesus placed a blessing on him for having made this change and for the good he was doing.

Understood in this light, as more than a simple story of salvation, this story embodies the promise that anyone who desires to see Jesus will. More than that, anyone who desires to see Jesus will, in turn, be seen by Jesus and in this way have their joy made complete.

Once again, as I've been doing often in these early days of this congregation's journey through transition, I ask you to think on these things in respect to your personal life; and I encourage you to think about them in respect to your corporate life as this body of Christ. I hope you are looking for Jesus, and actually seeing him.

I know we are being seen by Jesus. I believe, at this point in time, he is pouring out his love on you to heal your wounds and restore your hearts to see him alive among you. And that's exactly what we need right now.

Jesus is offering a blessing over you for his service you've already done. Do you feel it? And Jesus is offering a blessing over you for the work and play you will do as you continue to follow him.

Seeing Jesus is never a matter of luck. Jesus sees us, even calls us by name. Do you want to see him? In spite of all that has happened to put you in this time of transition, are you determined to not let it become the obstacle that keeps you from seeing Jesus? Are you determined to not let the anxiety of moving in a new direction keep you from seeing Jesus? May we all be just as determined as Zacchaeus was to see Jesus.