

## Salvation Has Come

Luke 19:1-10

We have all heard the story of Wee Zacchaeus, such a peculiar little man. Many of us have even sung about him. In this powerful and moving story from Luke's Gospel, a wealthy tax collector named Zacchaeus responded to the call of Jesus. Even though he was a social outcast at the time, it is fun to think of wee Zacchaeus relaxing with the great saints and apostles of the early church. In a group photo, he might either be sitting in the front of the group, or better yet, still hanging out in a tree with a very big smile on his face. In ten short verses (no pun intended) we learn a lot about this little man from Jericho. Not only is he rich; as the *chief* tax collector, he is particularly despised by his fellow Jews. The chief collectors were known for colluding with Rome and for taking advantage of others to make a good profit for themselves—think corrupt subprime mortgage agents on steroids.

Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem to face his death when he encountered this man whom we might rightly expect him to rebuke. Jesus was always welcoming the wrong people and confounding the good righteous people. However, this important and disliked community businessman did something extraordinary. He had obviously heard a bit about this man Jesus who was coming through town. He wanted to get a look for himself, but the crowds got in the way. He put pride aside to get a good view. He dashed ahead of Jesus and climbed a sycamore tree, whose low branches made a good climbing tree for a little man. It is not clear from the text whether Zacchaeus merely wanted to observe Jesus (who had a reputation as a friend to sinners and tax collectors) or if he hoped to address Jesus directly. Either way, he encountered obstacles in his pursuit. Some scholars have suggested that the reference to Zacchaeus' stature may have more to do with his profession than his actual height. The crowd may have shunned or barricaded him because of what he did for a living. In any case, Zacchaeus was hindered from seeing Jesus. "Ah, now I can see him."

This did not prevent Jesus from coming to Zacchaeus' tree, making eye contact with him, calling him down, and inviting himself into the tax collector's home and life. What a shock for Jesus to stop and give Zacchaeus the honor of staying at his house that night. Here is a stark reminder that on our own, apart from God, we are hindered from seeing and experiencing the grace of God. Our sinful condition eclipses the light of God from shining into our lives (Matt. 6:23; John 3:19). However, when God speaks light into our hearts, God gives us knowledge of the glory of God in Jesus Christ (John 1:5; 2 Cor. 4:6; Eph. 5:8).

The social outcast responds to this with great joy! When the good church folk grumble that Jesus was staying with a sinner, Zacchaeus stood up on his little feet, stretched up as tall as he could, and declared that he would give half his possessions to the poor. What is more, he will repay any fraud fourfold. This went far beyond what Jewish law demands. Zacchaeus made this commitment not with a frown on his face, but with a light heart and a smile. Jesus confirmed that "salvation has come to this house" (v. 9), because Zacchaeus is indeed a child of Abraham just like the grumblers.

The story of Zacchaeus tells us that the gospel is about serious commitment to God, but it is also about joy. We good church folk do not always do joy very well. Zacchaeus' little stand and big smile convict us to do better. Communion is serious business, but it is also a celebration. The word "Eucharist" means thanksgiving. As we share the elements with each other and remember we are sharing the "bread of heaven" and "cup of salvation," and we give thanks to God! We respond to Jesus' invitation to the table with joy because we are included in God's family.

The story of Zacchaeus also tells us something about looking for Jesus, even as he is looking for each one of us. It is comforting to remember the last words Jesus says in this story: "For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost" (v. 10). Our salvation is *not* contingent on our efforts—thanks be to God! This reassurance does not mean that we may remain totally passive, going about life without a thought how we can take a step toward Jesus as he walks miles to find us time and again.

The stories of how each of us looks for God are going to be varied, but we can take a few tips from Zacchaeus. He humbles himself by running and climbing a tree. Zacchaeus was not thinking of appearances. He was thinking about Jesus. He was not trying to be anyone but himself. He just wanted to see Jesus. The crowds were getting in the way, so he climbed a tree.

As we try to follow Christ in worship, in our work lives, or in the marketplace, we can remember a happy saint of the church on this All Saints Sunday: Zacchaeus. We may not *have* to climb a tree to see Jesus above the crowd—Jesus will find us anyway. If, however, you are finding yourself tired of staring at the backs of the crowd, look for your tree to climb. If graced with a memorable encounter with God, perhaps your response will be as joyous as Zacchaeus's and it will lead to your own kind of cheerful commitment to justice. "For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost." **Laura S. Sugg**

In our passage at hand, Jesus sought not only the lost in general but Zacchaeus in particular. Here as elsewhere, Jesus selected individuals from crowds and extends personal invitations to them to become followers (Matt. 4:18-22; John 1:35-51). Zacchaeus was just such a one.

This divine calling by Jesus is the vocation of God to call persons out of sinfulness into his glorious light. Calvin suggests that encountering Jesus in this manner, as the Word of God, is to commune with the light of God and reflect the glory of God. Although the text did not use the word "call," Jesus did *call out* to Zacchaeus, and in doing so he initiated salvation.

When God calls us, we respond with faith and obedience. When Jesus called out the name "Zacchaeus," we can see that in our divine call God names us as his own children (Gal. 3:26), as he is Lord of salvation. This illustrates that the salvation of God always begins with God. Jesus is God with us, Immanuel, who saves us because we are powerless to save ourselves (Rom. 7:19).

Karl Barth writes that Jesus, the "One," is the initiator and sustainer of our calling and vocation. It is only in and through the being of Christ that we are called. Jesus pronounces the call and salvation of Zacchaeus by affirming that salvation has come to his house. Zacchaeus

is truly a "son of Abraham" (v. 9). We can agree with Paul that the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable (Rom. 11:29).

God calls us into a salvific relationship with himself, and we respond. The passage clearly portrays Zacchaeus's response to the call of the Messiah. Very simply, he comes down out of his safe haven in the tree and stands with Jesus, who "happily welcomed him." His actions teach us that there is always a human response to the gracious word of our Lord. This response is due to the refashioning of one's inner being by the grace of God, resulting in a redirection or repentance.

This redirection was evident in Zacchaeus as his attitude toward his fellow human beings changes. Without being prompted or coerced, he entrusts half of his estate to the poor and committed himself to making fourfold restitution to those against whom he has sinned (v. 8). Calvin said that Zacchaeus was "changed from a wolf not only into a sheep, but even into shepherd." Zacchaeus is coming into alignment with the word of God as a new creation. Zacchaeus went from being a distant observer of Jesus to being a faithful disciple of Christ.

### **Robert Leach**

On this All Saints Sunday we thank God for those who have gone before us and shown us the ways of faith: Zacchaeus, Alberta and Tom Jones, Robert O'Brien, Jean Buttery, Lois Juengel, Betty Trotter, Leon Holloway, Bill Parker, Grace Baldwin, Mr. Erwin, Patsy Gagnon, Loren Jolly, Patricia Harmon, and Herbert Smith. We thank God for what each meant to this congregation, for how they went on before us and how they cheered us on to faith and perseverance in the face of our challenges!