

Nov. 13, 2016.

Gospel Lesson

Luke 19: 1-9

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature.

So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way.

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.”

So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him.

All who saw it began to grumble and said,

He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.”

Zacchaeus stood there and said to Jesus,

Look Lord,

I give half of my possessions to the poor; and if I have wrongfully extracted anything of anyone, I pay back four times as much.”

Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham.”

Luke 19:1-9 Zacchaeus Revisited

We all love parades at least at some time in our lives. Excitement, anticipation, sights to see.

We all get excited when someone significant comes to visit.

We get the excitement of **Jesus** coming to Jericho: Everyone wanting to see him.

Zacchaeus joins in on the excitement but he also knows that he is out there - on the fringes of acceptability. Why? Well, he is the chief tax collector at this border town. He is considered a traitor, a collaborator with the Romans. He is the man that everyone loves to hate and hates to love.

But none the less he wants to see, really see **Jesus**. So he climbs a tree: A very immodest act for a person of his economic stature.

Jesus stops, recognizes the incongruity and calls out to **Zacchaeus** inviting himself over to Zacchaeus' house for a meal.

The crowd can't believe it. "*What's Jesus doing going to the house of a sinner.*" "*Who is this collaborating Chief tax collector to have Jesus visit him?*"

Assumptions are made all around. "*Jesus must be confused. He's made a mistake. Maybe Jesus isn't bringing in God's New Day after all? Zacchaeus just can't be part of Jesus' plan.*"

But he is, and unexpectedly Zacchaeus stands his ground amidst their grumbling and speaks out to **Jesus** for all to hear. "*Look Lord, I give half of my possessions, to the poor; and if I have wrongfully extracted anything of anyone, I pay back four times as much.*"

Now this is every minister's and church treasurer's dream. It would be so much easier to balance our church books if everyone seeking after **Jesus** was as generous in giving as Zacchaeus. We are in the wind up mode of our Stewardship campaign so my mind seems to be straying along this path.

However today, I'm turning down another path. You might have noticed a difference in Zacchaeus's response. We are used to hearing Zacchaeus *promise* going forward to give away half his possessions to the poor and *promise* to pay back 4 fold any one he has cheated: All this after being accepted by **Jesus**. But, have you ever noticed that the math just doesn't work in this case. If Zacchaeus has been acting as a hated Chief tax collector extracting excessive funds from the people, that are more than his allotted cut, then he is promising to give away and pay back at least 4 times

more money than he has to work with. For example, if just half of his income is fraudulent and he now gives the earned half away, then he can't pay out four times over from the fraudulent half that is left.

However it makes sense and the math works if the translation follows the actual verb tenses in the Greek. Scholars have recently noticed that the verb tenses for the words 'give' *didomi* and 'pay back' *apodidomi*, are **NOT** the future tense of 'I will give' and 'I will pay back' as commonly translated but are actually present tense. 'I give, I pay back.'

I have checked this out in my own Greek New Testament. This isn't the only example of traditional interpretive prejudices overriding straightforward translation. The Common English Version, The New English Translation, The World English Bible, The Message and the Harper Collins study Bible have each corrected this translational error but many of our other Bibles have not. One wonders why not?

With this correction to the translation, **Zacchaeus** is not promising to change his behaviour, he is pointing out what he is already doing.

The Message paraphrases it this way:

Everyone who saw the incident was indignant and grumped, "What business does he have getting cozy with this crook?" 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."

So, **Zacchaeus** is not promising to change his behaviour, he is pointing out the good he is already doing. He does not repent of his occupation; he doesn't give up being a tax collector. Rather he points out that he does his job and conducts his life at a higher level of integrity and compassion than anyone would possibly expect.

Now the story makes sense. Now we understand why **Zacchaeus** goes to such great lengths or heights to see **Jesus**. He is already a follower in heart and in deed. Now we understand how he can give so much away and still restore four fold any errors of over-charging.

In the midst of this revelation, **Jesus** acknowledges **Zacchaeus**' good works and honours them by declaring that salvation has come to his house and that **Zacchaeus** is indeed '*one of us*', a son of Abraham. Take note, **Jesus** praises not a *promise* but a *practice*.

Jesus restores **Zacchaeus** back into the social fabric of Jewish life in Jericho just as he restored the blind beggar as he entered the city. In each case the faith and gumption of the person made all the difference. With **Jesus** it's not about promises or political correctness. *It's about faith and faith-filled actions.*

The Good Chief Tax Collector now can remind us of another story unique to Luke's Gospel, the Good Samaritan. When we connect all this up to other parables exclusive to Luke's gospel like the Prodigal Son we begin to see clearly Luke's recurring warning, *"If you are not careful prostitutes and prodigals, hated half-breads and tax collector will entre God's New Day ahead of you. Not to mention the blind, the lame and the lepers."*

We discover today's story is really aimed at the crowd. The crowd is being challenged. Their uncharitable, judgmental, know it all attitude toward the Blind Beggar and **Zacchaeus** is being called into question. Luke's challenge to the early church now becomes clearer.

Let's move to the 21st Century. We are the crowd in 2016: And let me ask **Luke's** question: Who is our **Zacchaeus**, individually and collectively?

Who is the person we so distrust that we cannot recognize and will not credit their good works?

It might be a *family member or two* we've known all their lives and can't seem to let them climb out of that box of always being the baby or who could never get things right as a young person.

It might be a *politician or a President elect* who doesn't do what we think he or she should do and so we conclude that they will always make the wrong choices.

Perhaps it's the phantom *parking meter ticket giver person* who we love to hate even if we haven't adequately fed the meter.

Or that particular *religious group* we don't understand and so fear.

Perhaps it is a *visible minority or ethnic group* we don't feel comfortable around?

Life can certainly be confusing and complicated.

So who is our **Zacchaeus**?

Jesus' actions tell us "*don't just stand there judging, do what helps and make things right.*"

Luke's stories tell us "*If you're not careful prostitutes and prodigals, the hated half-breeds and tax collectors will entre God's New Day ahead of you. Not to mention the blind, the lame and the lepers.*"

Application for Today:

Have the faith to stop judging and be helpful.

It makes all the difference.

Hymn #138 MV My Love Colours Outside the Lines.

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