

The Twenty Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
Year C Proper 26
October 30, 2022
Luke 19:1-10

In the Name of One God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Earlier this week I was scrolling through a blog entitled *Unfolding Light*, which includes reflections written by Steve Garnaas-Holmes, a Methodist pastor living in Massachusetts. You've heard me use his work before. Several years ago he wrote a poem inspired by the Gospel story we just heard.

His poem is called: "From Zacchaeus' journal" and it goes like this:

*I never look sillier than
trying to compensate for shortcomings.
I thought I just wanted to see.
Did I know I really wanted to be seen?*

*He had me treed.
Still does.
Had he waited for me to invite him
I would still be up that tree.
There was no getting around.
The only way down was through him.*

*He loved me
before it was cool to love me.
Some say he didn't see my unworthiness,
but he's not blind to such trauma.
It was not pity that brought me down,
it was kinship.*

*He accepted me even before I repented.
I changed even before he blessed me,
as if something happened
before either of us moved.*

*How did my guest become my host,
my table become his?
Who knew I had such a generous heart?
What he sees that we don't!
It wasn't just forgiveness but re-connection
that he called salvation.
I am my own
walking miracle.*

One of the reasons I like this poem so much is because it raises up so many of the things I love about this story from Luke's gospel:

- 1) the near silliness of the scene,
- 2) the decidedly non silly way the story shows us the deep need we all have - of being seen and accepted by God for just who we are, and, finally,
- 3) the acknowledgement that it was through his relationship with Jesus, that Zacchaeus was saved.

There is a lightness to this text.

There is joy.

*I never look sillier than
trying to compensate for shortcomings.*

One writer notes that much of the charm in this story - and what helps clarify the author's intent - stems from the extremes demonstrated by Zacchaeus and Jesus.

"Zacchaeus is both extremely short and extremely rich. He impetuously runs up a tree to get a look at the passing prophet.

Jesus invites himself impulsively to Zacchaeus' house for a visit.

In response to that visit, Zacchaeus promises to donate half his possessions to the poor and to repay fourfold anyone he has defrauded.

It is in this context of these extravagant gestures that Jesus declares Zacchaeus' salvation...the most extravagant gesture of all (Procter-Smith in Feasting on the Word, p 261)."

There was no getting around.

The only way down was through him.

*It was not pity that brought me down,
it was kinship.*

And here is the most scandalous part of this gospel. Actually the most scandalous part of THE Gospel, the Good News, the son of God humbling himself to become one of us: Jesus saw Zacchaeus as a brother.

We see this story as a humorous - almost sweet - story. We see the lightness, the joy. The short man scampering up a tree.

The folks in the crowd, however, saw none of this.

They likely despised Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector – not just any lowly tax collector, mind you, but the CHIEF tax collector.

The great preacher Frederick Buechner describes Zacchaeus this way: “He's a sawed-off little social disaster with a big bank account and a crooked job.”

Yet, Jesus *honors* him. And he announces he will be coming to Zacchaeus' home for dinner.

*How did my guest become my host,
my table become his?*

God does not see like we see. God does not seek as we seek. God's justice is not our justice. And God doesn't seem to care - in this case - about our concerns or the crowds' concerns that Zacchaeus is somehow undeserving of Jesus' attention.

“The God we encounter in Jesus doesn't care about our sense of justice or fairness or any of the other ways we seek to order our world.

The only thing this God cares about is seeing – and seeking out – the lost and bringing them home again.

God's love routinely trumps justice and God's compassion overrides all of our sense of fairness (David Lose, *In the meantime*, 2016).”

Just as Jesus came to the home of Zacchaeus, Jesus comes to us. Our table becomes his. And we gather around the table as one. One with him. As a brother or sister.

The gospel declares that Zacchaeus is a fellow child of Abraham. A child of God. And that is all that matters. Zaccheaus is a walking miracle. And so are all of us.

Listen again to the poem:

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Dear People of St Clement – you are a walking miracle – a loving community of faith: active, generous, and fun to be with.

We have gone through a difficult time the last few years – some of it due to the pandemic – but I know for some of you the hard times have come – just from living day to day. There have been increased family responsibilities that were not anticipated, there have been relationships that tested vows and patience and the limits of our love, there has been addiction, illness, the death of loved ones, there have been global fears that have become particular for us – fears our world will not be safe for those who come after us, fears we will not be able to afford the life we hoped for, saved for, and sacrificed for.

Yet, as our stewardship theme for the year states, we are told by God to cast our fear aside. To not be afraid. Rather, to be confident in the saving acts of God.

*It wasn't just forgiveness but re-connection
that he called salvation*

We see in our gospel this morning the simple saving act of being curious and open –

- 1) curious about who God is,
- 2) open to God seeing us – our whole selves –
- 3) open to God coming toward us and entering our lives,
- 4) being open to the invitation offered by the table before us.

Just as God is deeply in love with Zaccheus, God is deeply in love with this congregation. Deeply in love with each one of you. Deeply curious about each one of you and seeking to know and love you even more.

There is no doubt about that.

*It wasn't just forgiveness but re-connection
that he called salvation*

We are saved through our connection with God – initiated in our case – by God in Jesus Christ – a God who humbles himself to be our kin.

But in his coming toward us – there is a call to follow him – to follow him into deeper relationship – not just with God – but with one another – to open ourselves to our brothers and sisters here and beyond our walls.

Re-connection will save us.

But it requires something of us. It requires curiosity and openness and a giving heart – one that looks to our neighbors in the pew and sees a friend who needs this community to thrive.

We are facing a difficult moment right now – we have fewer people coming to church and less money coming in. We are facing a significant deficit for 2022 while also looking to plan, with your pledges, for 2023.

If we prioritize the connection we have with Jesus and the connections we have with one another – if we show up for one another – and open our hearts to the God who called each of here to St Clement this morning - we will have all we need:

The love that sustains us.

There are wonderful things coming our way – there is a future seeking us out. Our job this morning - as hard as it is – is to cast our fear aside and trust in the slow work of God.

Amen.