

“Zacchaeus”

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Reformation Sunday  
20 Years in Ministry

*Ezekiel 18:21-29*

*Luke 19:1-10*

*Again[... ]when a wicked man turns away from the wickedness he has committed  
and does what is lawful and right, he shall save his life.*

*Ezekiel 18:27*

Let us pray... O God,

We thank you for your mercy and grace.

Bless us to keep our hearts open to receive and to give in turn...

Amen

I love this passage from Ezekiel!

It bears witness – not only to Jesus’ formula for forgiveness  
of 70 x 7 chances to repent, in other words, limitless,  
but that God also has a sense of humor.

It may be time and time again that a person does the wrong thing,  
realizes this with honest regret, and sincerely seeks to change,  
but falters by doing the same, wrong thing – again,  
only to restart on the road to redemption again...  
kind of like going on a diet.

*<sup>27</sup> Again[... ] when a wicked [person] turns away from the wickedness  
[they have] committed and does what is lawful and right,  
[they] shall save [their] life.*

That is what happened for Zacchaeus –

somehow he had a change of heart and found forgiveness, and not only that,  
but he wound up having Jesus Christ for a dinner guest!

Apparently, he recognized the pain he was causing by shortchanging others and  
especially disregarding the plight of poor people  
which prompted his promise to sincerely make amends.

This insight had something to do with Jesus coming to town...

In the Gospel of Mark, it says that ... *they [meaning Jesus and those  
who came with him from Galilee] came to Jericho;*

*and that he left] Jericho with his disciples and a great multitude –  
which implies more people joined him from Jericho.*

So, people knew who Jesus was and he was popular with them...

just like – they knew who Zacchaeus was – and he was as unpopular.

Just how unpopular was he?

Willard, p.2,

He was so notorious in the town of Jericho that nobody would even make room for him in the crowd to see Jesus passing by on the road. That was a problem, because Zacchaeus was a short person!

It was obvious that everyone held him in 'low' esteem and considered him to be a 'small'-minded person with 'little' stature in the community as a tax collector for the Romans in that region.

I imagine he was like those conniving characters that actor Danny DeVito has often played in the movies and on TV.

Still, Zacchaeus was so determined to see Jesus that he was willing to make a fool of himself by climbing up a tree just to get a glimpse since the crowd wouldn't let this happen any other way...

Like the crowd, Zacchaeus was caught up with the enthusiasm to see Jesus, but we don't know specifically what led to making such a change to his unscrupulous behavior?

Perhaps it was the personal attention that Zacchaeus received from Jesus who said to him:

*"Zacchae'us, make haste and come down;  
for I must stay at your house today."*

*So [Zacchaeus] made haste and came down, and received [Jesus] joyfully.*

*[Luke 5<sup>b</sup>-6<sup>a</sup>]*

Biblical storyteller Tom Boomershine sees this as an amusing – though bittersweet scene as Jesus' 'last chance to play' before the tragic events of his arrest and crucifixion.

Christ's apparent affection for this despised outsider was also the occasion for Jesus to have a respite from his concerns for the challenges ahead.

Once again, we see the dynamics of hospitality at work as Jesus virtually invites himself to the home of an outsider who was also an Empire insider:

*"I must stay at your house today!"*

It is in the course of this visit, that Zacchaeus makes those promises to repay all whom he had cheated and even contribute to help the poor.

Zacchaeus got a taste of Beloved Community, by sharing his home and a meal with others and by being acknowledged and accepted in return.

Still, there were some who just didn't get what Jesus was doing – voicing criticism for his having a meal with a hated tax collector.

They could not get passed *who* Zacchaeus had been or *what* he had done without considering the possibility that he could change.

Willard, p.3

This corresponds to a marvelous set of stories in the Gospel of Mark (chapters 2 to 5) that follow Jesus through the events of a single day – a Sabbath day, at that.

It begins with the Pharisees of the synagogue at Capernaum hardening their hearts against Jesus – even to make plans to kill him, because of his blatant disregard of Sabbath tradition.

In a confrontation later that day, Jesus warns that the ‘unforgivable sin’ is a heart closed to compassion and he teaches more about this through the ‘parable of the sower’ – comparing different kinds of soil to hearts that are streetwise, shallow, crowded with care, and hearts that have been cultivated to be free from those things.

That set of stories concludes with the leader of the Capernaum synagogue, Jairus, who seeks desperately for Jesus to help his dying daughter.

That personal connection of caring – knowing that Jesus cared and was capable, allowed not only for the child to be healed. but for Jairus to have a change of heart...

That change of heart for Jairus and Zacchaeus – that transformation of individual hearts, cultivated by love and forgiveness, can be the building block of social transformation for others in turn.

As the first verse of the folk hymn “Pass It On” says:

*It only takes a spark to get a fire going,  
And soon all those around can warm up in its glowing;  
That's how it is with God's Love, Once you've experienced it,  
You spread the love to everyone; You want to pass it on.*

In this stewardship season, let us be mindful of what it is that we are here to do in this time and place – to help with the building up of the Kingdom.

We have this beautiful church that gives us shelter from the elements in order to gather each Sunday and on holy days, to hear the Gospel – that Good News which has been passed down to us, from generation to generation for two millennia.

We have this beautiful church and its facilities in order to gather for fellowship with one another and to show hospitality to our wider community.

We have this beautiful church where we as individuals and as a congregation, can explore our faith through the ministries that we *do* under this roof, but also beyond these four walls.

We don't create the Kingdom of Heaven – we make room for the beloved community of that Kingdom to happen.

Something happened for Zacchaeus that he made a change and was willing, not only to make amends, but be open to help transform the world. with deeds to match words; So, let's go and do likewise...

Amen

## “Pass It On”

It only takes a spark to get a fire going,  
And soon all those around can warm up in its glowing;  
That's how it is with God's Love,  
Once you've experienced it,  
You spread the love to everyone  
You want to pass it on.

What a wonderful time is spring,  
When all the trees are budding  
The birds begin to sing, the flowers start their blooming;  
That's how it is with God's love,  
Once you've experienced it.  
You want to sing, it's fresh like spring,  
You want to pass it on.

I wish for you my friend  
This happiness that I've found;  
You can depend on God  
It matters not where you're bound,  
I'll shout it from the mountain top - PRAISE GOD!  
I want the world to know  
The Lord of love has come to me  
I want to pass it on.

I'll shout it from the mountain top - PRAISE GOD!  
I want the world to know  
The Lord of love has come to me  
I want to pass it on.

[http://www.hymnlyrics.org/newlyrics\\_p/pass\\_it\\_on.php](http://www.hymnlyrics.org/newlyrics_p/pass_it_on.php)

*Our first scripture lesson today come from Ezekiel 18:21-29.*

*It is a remarkable statement about God's judgment, forgiveness –  
and even God's sense of humor...*

<sup>21</sup> “But if a wicked man turns away from all his sins which he has committed  
and keeps all my statutes and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live;  
he shall not die.

<sup>22</sup> None of the transgressions which he has committed  
shall be remembered against him;  
for the righteousness which he has done he shall live.

<sup>23</sup> Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord GOD,  
and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?

<sup>24</sup> But[... ]  
when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity  
and does the same abominable things that the wicked man does,  
shall he live?

None of the righteous deeds which he has done shall be remembered;  
for the treachery of which he is guilty and the sin he has committed,  
he shall die.

<sup>25</sup> “Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’  
Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way not just?  
Is it not your ways that are not just?

<sup>26</sup> When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity,  
he shall die for it;  
for the iniquity which he has committed he shall die.

<sup>27</sup> Again[... ]  
when a wicked man turns away from the wickedness he has committed  
and does what is lawful and right, he shall save his life.

<sup>28</sup> Because he considered and turned away from all the transgressions  
which he had committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die.

<sup>29</sup> Yet the house of Israel says,  
‘The way of the Lord is not just.’

O house of Israel, are my ways not just? Is it not your ways that are not just?

*Let us be challenged and guided by these words...*

Luke 19:1-10

<sup>1</sup>[Jesus] entered Jericho and was passing through.

<sup>2</sup> And there was a man named Zacchae'us; he was a chief tax collector, and rich.

<sup>3</sup> And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not, on account of the crowd, because he was small of stature.

<sup>4</sup> So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was to pass that way. <sup>5</sup> And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him,

“Zacchae'us, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today.”

<sup>6</sup> So he made haste and came down, and received him joyfully.

<sup>7</sup> And when they saw it they all murmured,

“He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.”

<sup>8</sup> And Zacchae'us stood and said to the Lord,

“Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold.”

<sup>9</sup> And Jesus said to him,

“Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.

<sup>10</sup> For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost.”