

“4X” Luke 19: 1 – 10

Makemie Memorial Presbyterian Church

November 15, 2009

Stewardship Commitment Sunday, Baptism of Haden Reed Widmyer

Luke 19: 1 - 10

¹Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. ²A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. ⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way.

⁵When 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.”

⁶So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. ⁷All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.”

⁸Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.”

⁹Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”

Have you ever been to a parade where you couldn't see past the person in front of you? Perhaps the person in front of you was too tall or too wide, so you couldn't see the marching bands, the prancing horse, or the fire trucks flashing their lights. So you were then hoisted up on the shoulders of your father or grandfather & were able to clearly see the parade...the bands, the Lone Ranger's horse, the fire trucks.

I love the Christmas parade here in Snow Hill. Each parade our family talks about watching it from inside the manse, then we end up going out on the porch & finally sitting down on the curb. Along side of us, are dads * grand-dads with small children on their shoulders.

Today's text that Ted just read is a parade story, where short Zacchaeus couldn't see past all the people in the crowds. He wanted to see Jesus, but in order to do so, he had to climb a tree.

Here is the song you might remember from Sunday school: (my family strongly requests I say it not SING it!)

"Zacchaeus was a wee little man, a wee little man was he; He climbed up in a Sycamore tree, for the Lord that he could see; And as the

Savior passed his way, he looked up in that tree, And he said, 'Zacchaeus, you come down, for I'm going to your house today.'

And Zacchaeus is so overwhelmed to have Jesus as his honored guest that, in gratitude, he promised to pay back four times all the money he had cheated others out of & devote fifty percent of his income to helping those in need.

Luke says he was not only a tax collector, he was the *chief* tax collector for the region of Jericho. Think of him as a broker with other tax collectors reporting to him and, of course, giving him a sizable cut.

And if the people hated tax collectors in general, they couldn't have thought less of Zacchaeus. Plus, he was short. Not only could he not see over the heads of the others when Jesus passed his way, the others would've made sure that he stayed in the back of the crowd. They weren't about to let this little pipsqueak weasel his way in front of them. But all that was about to change; desperate to see Jesus for himself, Zacchaeus ran ahead of the crowd & climbed up in a tree so that, perched on a branch, he had a bird's eye view.

The people in the crowd may have laughed to see a grown man in a tree. But they didn't laugh when Jesus announced that he was going to

Zacchaeus' home for supper. To any self-respecting Jew, this would've been taboo, for to go to someone's home & share a meal with them was to affirm that person as a brother or sister for whom you were willing to lay down your life to provide for and protect.

Jesus had become well known & the crowds were turning out to see him. Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, healed Bartimaeus of his blindness and turned the water into wine. Jesus had status & the tens of thousands of people passing through Jericho wanted to see Jesus.

And Jesus sees Zaccheus and calls him by name. Zacchaeus might have thought: "How does he know *my* name? ... How would he know *me*? ... *Why me*? ... What does he want *with me*?" Zacchaeus quickly slid down the tree, the buttons bursting from his shirt with pride. "Jesus, I would be honored to have you come to my home, the loveliest villa in Jericho, right down there overlooking the river."

So the two of them went into Zacchaeus' home. Now, the Bible, doesn't tell us what the conversation was between them. We don't hear *one* word of what Jesus said to Zacchaeus while in the house together. In a few moments, Zacchaeus was going to come out of that house a *changed* man, and we don't know what Jesus said to him. If we knew what

Jesus said, then maybe we could say the same things & people would change.

About that time, Zacchaeus came out of the front door and addressed the large crowd who finally quiet down. He said, "I apologize to you. I have been cheating you for years. You know it & so do I. I've gotten richer at your expense. I apologize. To make it right, I will pay each one of you from whom I have stolen. I will repay you four times the amount I cheated you; everyone of you. Also, I am giving half of my goods to the poor of our city."

The crowd was shell-shocked. Their cynical selves couldn't believe it. One man piped up: "Sure Zacchaeus, we'll believe it when we see it. The Old Testament law is clear; you need to repay us what you stole from us plus 20%; but you say you are going to repay 4X's what you took? What's the gimmick, Zacchaeus? What's the trick?"

Another suspicious person chimed in: "*Half* your goods to the poor? You never cared a rip for the poor. You never dropped a dollar into the alms plate. When they rang bells for the poor at Hanukkah, you walked right on by the bucket. You often said: 'let the poor go to work and not live off handouts.' We'll believe it when we see it, Zacchaeus."

About that time, Jesus walked out, stood beside Zacchaeus, and quieted the crowds. “Today, salvation has come to Zacchaeus’s house. He has become a true son of Abraham. I have come to seek and save the lost. Zacchaeus has been found.”

This ends our story this morning, about a short man who climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus, a story about a man who was transformed from greedy to generous, from selfish to selfless, from a thieving heart to a thanksgiving heart. We ask ourselves: “What did Jesus say to him there in that house?” If only we knew what Jesus said, then perhaps we could say similar things to each other, and we too would be changed and become equally generous.

How can we apply this story to our own lives? Perhaps we could talk about the fact that three stories earlier in the Gospel of Luke, we heard about the rich young ruler who wanted to be saved. Jesus invited him to sell all he had and give it to the poor. The young man couldn’t do it. Jesus said, “It is harder for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. But with God, all things are possible.” And now, three stories later, we discover a rich man who goes through the eye of a needle and is saved. We could focus on that, but we won’t.

Or perhaps we could talk about the fact that Zacchaeus was the biggest immoral scoundrel in town, a skunk, a reprobate, the worst of all possible sinners and Jesus ate a meal with him. We could talk about the fact that Jesus will eat with anyone.

Jesus loved Zacchaeus, the biggest sinner in town. Jesus loved him, and in that love, Zacchaeus was transformed. We have this temptation within ourselves to withhold love from people, when we don't like the shape of the sinfulness in their lives. For example, a husband and wife may have some qualities that really grate each other, and over time, there is the temptation to withhold love from my husband or wife because the nature of their sinfulness irritates so much. Or your teenager, going through that teenager rebellion which is so hard for everyone, and there is a temptation to withhold one's love when the rebellion is at the worst. Or when your boss is so autocratically and blindly demanding or the person who works for you is so inept and incompetent in doing trivial tasks, over time there is a temptation to withhold one's love because one doesn't like the shape of sinfulness in the other person. Or your neighbor with the incessantly barking dog or tall trees that block your view. Or for those who have adult children, when those adult children make choices that disappoint the frustration of seeing their consequences of poor choices, that parents begin

to slowly withhold their love from them. Or towards ourselves, the person living underneath our own skin, we may not like the sinfulness in ourselves and so we begin to withhold our love for ourselves because we see ourselves as being so inept and incompetent. So let me say is clearly, so you all can hear: *Jesus loved Zacchaeus, even though he was the worst of sinners. When you and I are at our sinful worst, Jesus continues to love us also.* I think this is the truth at the heart of this story. And it is within that quality of love that a person is changed.

And so it is with all of us. We cover it up; we pretend our sinful side is not that bad; we minimize the nature of our sinfulness. But the important point is this: Jesus loves us in our sinfulness, even when we cover it up and pretend otherwise.

So, that is the first thing I wanted to talk about today. But the second is equally important, that Zacchaeus was changed. Zacchaeus was changed, from being greedy to generous, from selfish to selfless, from a thieving heart to thankful heart. How did this happen? What did Jesus say to him when they were alone? I mean, Zaccheus only had to pay back what he stole plus 20%; but he *wanted to pay them back 4X's what he had taken.* He didn't *have* to do that, according to Old Testament law. He

wanted to. Make it good 4X's over. And on top of that, he then volunteered to give 50% of his goods away to the poor. 50%! He didn't *have* to; he *wanted* to. There is a *huge change in the level of financial generosity within his heart*.

Last week, we talked about how Jesus wanted us to move from *little faith* to *great faith*, that *little faith* had some *power* for daily living where as *great faith* has *great power* for daily life. You don't want *little faith*; you want *great faith*. Likewise, *you don't want little generosity; you want great generosity*.

And don't we want to be people of great faith, whose great faith makes a difference in the way we live our lives, great faith which makes a difference in the way we give offerings to God. We give with great joy.

I love this story. I can see it so clearly. Zacchaeus wanting to see Jesus of Nazareth, but all those people were in his way. Cleverly, Zacchaeus looked down the Jericho road and climbed a sycamore tree and waited, and sure enough, here came Jesus. Right underneath where Zacchaeus was perched on a limb. And Jesus said: "Zacchaeus...you come down...for I am coming to your *home* today."

Oh, and there is one thing more. Wonder of wonders the camel does make it through the eye of the needle. Zacchaeus starts out a wealthy tax collector. But Jesus gives him a new name. Zacchaeus ends up a son of Abraham. That's what we always receive from him, a new name, son, daughter of Abraham, child of God. Because in the last analysis that's the only name that counts. The one freely given. Amen.

Amen.