

Reflecting on God's Word

Reading: Luke 19:1-10 (NT page 1053)

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Background to the reading

Our reading takes place in the city of Jericho which was a border town on the border between Judea and Perea. And because of the fact that it was a border town, it was popular amongst the tax collectors. Our main character Zacchaeus, was a chief tax collector which meant that he was a wealthy man. The tax collectors were not popular amongst their contemporaries and were seen as collaborators with the foreign Roman government.

Jesus and his disciples entered Jericho and Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus. However he was short. For Zacchaeus to be “short” by ancient Mediterranean standards probably meant he was less than five feet tall. So he climbed in a tree to see better. With its pleasant climate year-round, Jericho was especially noted for its palm trees but supported many other trees as well, including the well-known sycamore tree. The kind of “sycamore” tree described here is related to the fig tree and was easy to climb.

Then a strange thing happens. Jesus knew before the time that there was a man in a tree and that his name was Zacchaeus. Jewish people normally considered the ability to call the name of someone one had never met—as Jesus does here with Zacchaeus—to be the sort of thing that only a prophet could do.

Jesus then invites himself to Zacchaeus' house. No matter how high their status, people did not normally invite themselves to someone else's home. Pious Jews would also be loath to enter the home of a tax gatherer or to eat of his food (which Jesus' language also implies). According to them, his food would have been unclean and they would have seen him as “working for the enemy” at the cost of his own people, only enriching himself.

But Zacchaeus responded with grace – offering his house to Jesus gladly. But then all the people according to Matthew started moaning, how can Jesus be a guest of a sinner, such a despised man?

Zacchaeus responded again by saying that he will make amends. He will give away all his possessions to the poor and if cheated anybody out of anything, he will pay back four times the amount. The law prescribed that if you cheated someone out of their money, you had to give back the full amount plus one fifth. Zacchaeus is willing to give back the full amount plus 4 times the amount! He clearly changed his way of life since his meeting with Jesus.

Jesus responded by accepting him into the household of God and declaring him as one of the righteous, as a son of Abraham. In this context salvation refers to inner wholeness, the salvation of the soul. The covenant of God's blessing had been given to Abraham, and those who claimed it were called "children of Abraham". Salvation had come to Zacchaeus not because of his blood descent, but because of his faith, which was like Abraham's.

Verse 10 is a summary of the entire message of the Gospel of Luke, which stresses the seeking and saving work of the heavenly Messiah.

MSP 48 **Be still and know**

Sermon

The text verses for the sermon are: 9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

Jesus was preparing the way for all his followers. To Him everyone mattered. He knew Zachaeus even before He physically saw him. And Zachaeus well he could have stayed quiet about his illegal moneymatters but he didn't. In the presence of Jesus he accepted his guilt and made it right. He acted in faith al

through the story although he was the outsider. But through his faith and commitment, he found healing, grace and mercy in the presence of God.

I think we too must try to look for the presence of God everywhere we go – even if it means that we climb in a proverbial tree to see better. And yes to climb in a tree is not always easy just like it is definitely not easy to follow Jesus every moment of every day.

I remember a funny story when thinking about climbing trees. My grandmother was getting on with age and every year her gardener would pick apricots for her to cook apricot jam. One year the gardener was off work for quite a long time and she was stuck. So one morning she phoned up her sister to come and assist her, as she decided to climb in the apricot tree all by herself. I do not know if anyone has climbed in an apricot tree before, but I can tell you one thing it is not the best tree to climb. The branches are not very strong and they easily snap. But my granny persevered and climbed in the apricot tree. Eventually everything went fine until she wanted to climb higher and a branch snapped. To cut a long story short, she fell out of the tree in a heap of rotten apricots lying under the tree! Her sister could not help her up because she was laughing so much and did not want to get herself dirty! It is still to this day a story that everyone laughs about.

But I guess this is exactly what it means to be a follower of Jesus. It is like climbing a tree to see better and yes sometimes we do fall out of the tree in a heap of rotten fruit. It is then that we must realise that we have to stand up and get into the tree again because if you don't you will not get the apricots. And if we fall into the proverbial rotten fruit, it must remind us that this life is not our destiny. Our whole lives must be dedicated to see and experience the presence of the Lord all around us, as we journey towards our final heavenly destination. This morning you and I WERE sitting in a proverbial fruit tree where we saw the workings of the Lord in the baptism of a baby. Last week WE SAW JESUS CHRIST in the elements of bread and wine.

But daily we must seek the presence of the Lord in everything we think, do and say. And if you are sitting in this church and you think of yourself as a sinner, as someone who is too far away from the Lord, or thinking that you are not even a believer, think again. Our Lord and Saviour knows you, He knows your Name, He knows everything what you think, do and say. He knows the inside of your being. He also knows your reservations or resistance. He will reach out to you in ways you cannot imagine. He will help and lead you in a direction you have not envisaged just like Zacchaeus experienced a long time ago. I am sure he woke up that day never knowing that his life, future and destiny will change forever. I hope this can be said of all of us.

Let's face it. I do not know of anyone – atheist and/or agnosticist who could survive this life on their own. It is only the presence of God who can turn night into day, darkness into light, doubt into hope. It is only God who can make sense in your life when the going gets tough.

God is reminding us all again of our priorities. To serve the Lord God will mean that He is our first priority in life. Zacchaeus realised that his wealth is not going to give meaning to his life. And it is then that the words of Jesus makes sense: " For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

May we all become renowned climbers of trees seeking the Lord always.

Amen