

Sunday between 30<sup>th</sup> October and 5<sup>th</sup> November [31]

Luke 19:1-10

The gospel reading today is one that is known very well by anyone who studied regularly at Sunday School. It may have been a long time ago for some of us, but this story is a Sunday School favourite, it even has its own song which some people may remember. It is a popular story because there is so much within it that we can relate to, even all these years since this encounter occurred. It is especially meaningful to children as they can relate to poor Zacchaeus' inability to see what was going on due to his height!

But to really study a text, particularly one we think we already know well, it is helpful to put our text in context. This story comes immediately after the story of Jesus' encounter with a blind man, Bartimaeus, sitting by the side of the road as He was approaching Jericho. Our text says that Jesus was approaching Jericho as He was passing through. Where was he going?

In the previous chapter, beginning at verse 31, it says "Jesus took the twelve aside and told them, 'we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. On the third day, he will rise again.'" Jesus had an important mission ahead of Him, he was ready to make his great stand, the ultimate sacrifice for all people and that is where he was heading.

But think about the timing for a moment. When we are on a mission to accomplish something, when we are really focused on a goal, don't we try to be as efficient with our time as possible? Sometimes we may forget to be nice to the people around us. We may not exchange pleasantries with people we normally would in the rush to get to our destination. we may even get so busy we forget to eat.

But not Jesus when Jesus has a task to do he dawdles. Was He scared? Did he have cold feet about going through with his life's mission? Was he having second thoughts? Maybe he decided just to put it off a week? People had been living in their sins for a long time, what was another day or two, either way? Why would he do such a thing? It is something to think about, we are not told the answer.

What we can be sure about, though, is that after three years of doing miracles, travelling around, teaching, even raising the dead there were very few people in 1st century Palestine who hadn't heard of Jesus. Yet there were certainly people who hadn't seen him or had a chance to meet him and as he travelled around, they sought him out.

Zacchaeus was one of those people. He wanted to at least get a glimpse of the man maybe even get a chance to meet the prophet, the healer, the teacher. He had a problem though, he was short and there was a large crowd. Anyone who is a short person will know that you learn to be aware of your surroundings and to use them to your advantage, whether it is sitting on an aisle so that you can look around the person in front of you at a cinema, or always keeping a step ladder handy. Yet there are few people who feel so strongly about seeing something that they have been willing to climb a tree or be undignified in order to get that better view.

To get ahead of the crowd, our text says Zacchaeus had to run. To run in a robe means you have to hike it up a bit in order to not trip and fall. If that weren't bad enough, Zacchaeus, a rich and widely known man, stooped to climbing a tree like a schoolboy. He must have really wanted to see Jesus badly in order to put his dignity to one side. But it was all worth it, Jesus walks to the spot where Zacchaeus was perched, invites him to come down and then invites himself over to Zacchaeus house. How amazing would that have been for this man who just wanted to see Jesus.

Jesus doesn't just do that for Zacchaeus, this is what Jesus does for us too. He invites himself into our lives to have a relationship with us that is why he came.

But Zacchaeus wasn't even a good guy, he was hated in his community. He worked for the enemy, the Romans, who were subjugating the Jewish people, disrupting their way of life and then taxing them in order to pay for it. Zacchaeus had a big problem, he hadn't made any friends in doing his job. Jericho, in Jesus' day was a prosperous city, Balsam was a major export of the area and a tax collector was probably making a lot of money taxing the lucrative trade. Zacchaeus was not a very loved individual and the people made it very clear that they didn't much care for Jesus choosing to go to Zacchaeus house.

Have you ever been slighted? Have you ever felt like somebody else got an award or an honour that you deserved? That's how the people of Jericho felt, it should have been their house that was blessed with Jesus' presence. Do we pick and choose between people like these people did? Of course we do, and if we say we don't we are only fooling ourselves. Each and every one of us passes judgement on our fellow humans, our neighbours, friends, family, Church members, all the time whether we mean to do it or not. We measure ourselves against others and the reality is that we like to measure against those who we feel we're doing better than one way or another.

But who decides who will go to heaven, is that any of us? Of course not. Each time we make such judgements about people we only damage our relationship with God because through his relationship with Zacchaeus Jesus sets us our example for dealing with those who are different from us, even those we perceive to be living worse lives than ourselves. We cannot know who God will choose to call into relationship, who God will call to become a member of our church community. It is Jesus' job to judge and he wants all people to make it into heaven. That is what we should want as well, and our role is to love and accept those who God has brought into our lives, even those we find difficult to love.

That is what Jesus came for and that is why he makes the pit stop to Zacchaeus' house. As it says at the end of our text, "for the Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost." By the grace of God each of us lost ones has been found, and there is endless room at the table for others to come to know God' grace with us, may our prayer be that those who are lost and seeking God, find such welcome and hospitality amongst us, that they come to know the love of Christ here and now.