

Last week we talked about the Loving Father
and the younger son who was lost and found
and forgiven beyond even our own understanding.
And we heard the story of singer-songwriter James Taylor
when he was in a bad time in his life called his father from NYC.
And to his amazement, his dad said stay there and I will be there
or use another one of JT's songs...
you just call out my name and you know wherever I am
I'll come running to see you again.
His dad immediately drove 13 hrs. to pick
him up and take him back home to NC.
Taylor never forgot that his dad would seek him when he was lost.
Today's scripture is all about how Jesus came
to seek and save the lost everywhere he went.

19 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy.

What do you know about Zacchaeus?
Maybe the only thing you know is he was short.
Anyone who grew up going to Sunday School or VBS
probably knows the song
Zaccheus was a wee little man and a wee little man was he.
But I am glad that Taylor told you what I
usually tell folks about this passage which is...
we don't know for sure that it was Zacchaeus who was short.
But Pastor hold on the text says

3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

Well yes, but you see it isn't clear who the "he" was...
because in ancient Greek grammar,
the way it is written could mean that Jesus was hard to see
because Jesus was short not Zacchaeus and so he had
to climb a tree to see Jesus over the crowd's heads.
Now there is a bigger discussion in the book about
Jesus' height or lack thereof but it does beg an interesting question...
How tall is your Jesus?
How are you with a short Jesus?

After Taylor says his power doesn't come from his height...
but we do seem to have an innate bias that associates height with authority.
(my height)

5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." 6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

What else do you know about Zacchaeus?

The second part of verse two tells us **he was a chief tax collector**
But tax collectors in Jesus' day were not like IRS agents or anything.
In Jesus' time, the Roman government
contracted with local people to collect taxes.
But the Romans didn't pay these people a salary.
So tax collectors took their cut off the top of what they made people pay.

and was wealthy.

He was not just any tax collector.
In other translations, he was a ruler among tax collectors and he was rich.
We are reminded that in the last chapter of Luke
Jesus told a rich ruler to sell all his possessions and
give the money to the poor and then Jesus makes this prediction...
that it would be easier for a camel to squeeze
through the eye of a needle than
for a rich person to enter God's Kingdom (18:25).
Luke's Jesus has a heart for the poor and not so much for the wealthy.
But Jesus then said, " What is impossible for humans is possible for God.
So, if Zacchaeus or any rich ruler or sinner was going
to enter the kingdom of God it was going to take the grace of God. But

7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

Now the crowd knew he was a tax collector and they were
some of the most hated people by the Jews.
Because they were considered traitors to their people.
Now usually the people who muttered the most were? The Pharisees.
They grumbled about Jesus eating with sinners in Luke 15
which led to the 3 stories about the lost things.
But this time everyone is getting in on the action.

Maybe even the disciples as Luke doesn't tell us
they were there or not there.
They had just been on crowd control duty.
So far, they tried to stop little children from coming to him
and they just got through scolding a blind man
who called out to Jesus for mercy.
They were two for two.
Maybe just maybe the disciples needed to hear
this lesson that God offers the gift of salvation
to all children, blind men, and even tax collectors.

That is a lesson for us as modern-day disciples too.
As the crowd we have to remember that God has a heart for seekers.
We tend to put people into categories and we love
to gather into tribes and decide who is in and who is out.
We believe some people will never change and
we are likely to write them off at some point.
So and so will never...if they ever came to church the roof would fall in...

Last week in the story of the Prodigal Son
we didn't focus on the older son when the younger son came home
but we are often the older son who gets upset that
Jesus is throwing a party for someone
we don't like or we think doesn't deserve it.
We talked a lot about this at our Wed Night study.
Why is it that we get so upset when someone
receives grace that we may think or doesn't deserve it?
And why of all the people he could have picked out of the crowd
to go and have a party with does Jesus pick the biggest
sinner around and the worst of the worst even in his disciples' eyes?

Taylor tells us that Bishop Will Williamon once preached that
"the crowd, the good-enough church-going, Bible-believing,
close-friends-with-God folk of Jericho, hated Jesus for"
extending salvation to one such as Zacchaeus.
At one point or another, we are in or have been in the crowd
that grumbled as we consider the people we just can't
imagine that Jesus would go visit or include in the kingdom.

Instead, we have to remember that **we are Zacchaeus**.
Zacchaeus just wanted to get a better view of Jesus

and decided to climb a tree to do it.

Zaccheus was a success as his world measured success.

But he must have realized that something was missing in his life.

Are you missing something in your life?

I mean why would he go to such lengths...

or literally heights to see Jesus and draw such attention to himself?

And Jesus must have sensed what he was seeking...

5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, **“Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.”**

Do you remember growing up inviting yourself over to your friend's house?

There was that house that always had the best food or snacks.

Taylor tells us something also important to remember

in this story that every observant Jew would know.

That Jesus' presence would bring ritual purity

and a dignified social presence to Zacchaeus' home.

A tax collector would have always been handling

unclean things and going into unclean Gentile places.

A rabbi would be sacrificing some of his clean by going into his home.

Now we don't know what happened in between

the crowd grumbling and getting to Zacchaeus house.

Maybe it was an awkward silence or maybe Jesus

just looked at him in that Jesus way.

Or maybe he didn't want the crowd to give Jesus the wrong impression.

For whatever reason spontaneously it seems

he rushed to make sure that Jesus knew his heart

8 Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

So Zacchaeus answers a question that Jesus never asks.

Jesus isn't focused on his first impressions or

his reputation as a tax collector.

He has come to bring salvation to all.

And we see this radical change in this tax collector

and his behavior because of his encounter with Jesus.

We see this new creation in Christ as Paul tells us we are

who decides to live by a radically different set of values.

There was an expectation that if you wanted to make restitution for what you had done you would pay back what you had taken with even some interest. But what Zach offers is 4 times the amount. This is really putting your money where your mouth is.

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 the lost."

Jesus had come for this to bring salvation to all.
Who? All. All means y'all. And when?
Not just any day but when? Not tomorrow. Today.
And as we consider that we are the crowd.
And that we are Zacchaeus.

We also are the church.

And Jesus' words to Zacchaeus are no doubt being heard by all who are gathered. Those who follow him and fear him. Because the next verse after today says they listened to this. Zacchaeus was serving as an example to the crowd and to us the church. Saying to us that we need to look around and see those who are seeking. Those who are open to change and want to join in God's transforming work. To not give up on anyone. To never say when hell freezes over. Because I have been to Hell Michigan and it certainly freezes over all the time. So anything is possible.

Taylor reminds us that the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles were written by Luke and were two volumes of one story. So the stories that we read in Luke's gospel lead up to expanding God's kingdom through the apostles and the church. In Acts 1:8 the apostles are called by Jesus to be his **witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.**

Taylor challenges today's church with this question... can we follow Jesus' example and go into unexpected places to bring his salvation to all? Has the church learned what Zacchaeus himself learned?

Do we seek Jesus like he did?
Do we still see ourselves as seekers?
Zacchaeus climbed a tree to seek Jesus.
Something a dignified Jew in Jesus' day wouldn't do but he was a seeker.
He knew something was wrong in his life
and he knew someone who could make it right.

What are we willing to do to seek Jesus?

We just might find that Jesus has been seeking us all along.
And we might discover that salvation
has come to our house today too.
And we might even come to realize that salvation comes
not because we earned it but because Jesus
came to seek and save the lost no matter who we are.
In what ways can we, as the church,
take the love of Jesus to unlikely places in your community?
Maybe our mobile home park...