

Today we have the story of Jesus and Zacchaeus. I cannot seem to hear today's story without calling to mind a song I learned in Vacation Bible School as a child. The song goes like this:

*Zacchaeus was a wee little man, and a wee little man was he.
He climbed up in a sycamore tree, for the Lord he wanted to see.
And as the Savior passed that way he looked up in that tree.
And he said, 'Zacchaeus, you come down.
For I'm going to your house today,
For I'm going to your house today.'*

Indeed, I have a fond memory attached to this song. I'm sure many of you do, too. Zacchaeus' main claim to fame, it seemed, was that he was short, a feature that was, of course, appealing to those of us who were ourselves "wee little" people at the time.

If we read carefully Luke 19:3, however, we will find an interesting detail there. The text says Zacchaeus "was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not because he was short in stature." Interestingly, today's scripture does not tell us *which* of the two men was short in stature. Most of us just assume the "he" in question was Zacchaeus. But we see Jesus also would have been hard to spot in the crowd if He, Jesus, was short in stature and surrounded by people who were taller than He was, like me "Sunny" in the crowd ☺

But, we were taught all these years, and we assume that Zacchaeus was a "wee little man." Of course, we'll never know which of the two, Jesus and Zacchaeus, the narrator of today's story, is referring to as a short man in stature. Though a fascinating question this is, it's an interpretive dead-end since we have no other evidence outside this story to clarify which of the two gentlemen was, like me, vertically challenged.

Honestly, who is the short man in the story is not the main point here. However, I bring this up to us today because reading the scripture as it is written, without coding it with our preconception or assumption, is very essential to understand what the Bible is saying and not saying.

Even though today's scripture does not say clearly which of these men is "vertically challenged," it says enough about Jesus and Zacchaeus. First, we are told that Zacchaeus was "a chief tax collector and was rich" (Luke 19:2). Tax collectors were despised in that day for their cooperation with the oppressive Roman government. And Zacchaeus had apparently done well for himself in this line of work. He was a *chief* tax collector, which means he must have been promoted at some point for cooperating well with the Romans.

Today's story of Jesus and Zacchaeus further points out that Zacchaeus was rich. Since tax collectors were generally known to be lining their pockets at the expense of their neighbors, it is interesting that the narrator of today's story feels a need to point this out. Again, it seems we're being told Zacchaeus is not just any run of the mill tax collector. He has apparently excelled at taking advantage of people for his gain.

And yet, he is fascinated by what he has heard of Jesus. Fascinated enough to do something a wealthy official would not normally do, scampering his way up into a tree so that he could catch a glimpse of Jesus as he walked by with the crowd. This image of a grown man up on a tree in today's story makes us pause and wonder.

Whatever reasons Zacchaeus had for him to be up on a tree, notice that Jesus has a plan of His own. Jesus gathers everyone under that sycamore tree, and he says to Zacchaeus, "Oh, hi, Zach. Hurry and come down now; you're hosting me tonight." To this, without any questions, Zacchaeus *hurried* down at once and was *happy* to welcome Jesus (Luke 19:6).

This says a lot about Zacchaeus. Even though he has financial success and success in his career, he is not happy with his life. He longs for a change. So, he comes to Jesus and hears Jesus calling him by his name unexpectedly. Not only calling him, but Jesus also says that He will stay at his house.

People looked down on Zacchaeus, and they didn't want to be around him. But not Jesus. Jesus *recognized* Zacchaeus, *called* him by his name, and told him that He would *stay* with him. These simple gestures of kindness changed Zacchaeus. His life was transformed. *Salvation* came to his house. And it took a very concrete form—helping the poor and practicing radical generosity.

Are you "Zacchaeus" now? For whatever reasons, people look down on you. And distance themselves from you. If you are, then come to Jesus who took the crown of thorns on your behalf and died to recognize you, called you, loved you, and promised that He will stay with you. He will transform your life with His loving-kindness. So, come to the Lord today if you are a "Zacchaeus."

More practically, contact us, the people of Kona UMC, if you are one of those "Zacchaeus." We will embrace you as you are and spoil you with the loving-kindness of God given to us. You may also contact a local church in your area. I'm sure that they will welcome you, too. Please know that life with Christ is much better than life without Christ. Let me repeat one more time. Please hear me. Life with Christ is much better than life without Christ.

Now, if you are not "Zacchaeus" but bystanders who just watch "Zacchaeus" in the community OR you are the person who looks down on someone or thinks badly about someone, here is a challenge for you. Make an effort to love those "Zacchaeus" you see in life. It could be as simple as a smile or saying "Hi" or asking them to sit at lunch with you or even play with you. This simple act of kindness is what changed Zacchaeus in today's story. Maybe Jesus would like to use us to change somebody else's life today...maybe... If so, let it be in Christ Jesus. Amen.