

## **REFORMATION FOR GROWN UPS**

**Luke 19:1-10**

**Preached by Dr. Cahill**

**Babcock Presbyterian Church**

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“Zacchaeus was a wee little man, a wee little man was he!” How many of us sang this song in church’s school? This is one of most kid’s favorite Bible stories, because they can identify with Zacchaeus. Why? They ignore his flawed character and instead focus on his height. Like themselves, Zacchaeus had to stand on a chair or climb up a tree to see over the shoulders of taller people. And when Jesus looked up at Zacchaeus and singled him out for attention children feel vicariously special through this wee little man.

But we’re grown ups and can’t afford to see Zacchaeus through the eyes of a five year old. His being vertically challenged shouldn’t be our main concern, instead, it should be his stunted spiritual growth. You might say Zacchaeus was the poster boy for arrested development.

Zacchaeus, the local tax collector had to be a resentful little man, and you have to wonder why would he, a Jew, turn on his own people and work for the Romans, occupiers of the Holy Land. Sure the pay was good and he had perks and privileges, but was it worth it? Did tax collectors enjoy being shunned and despised by former friends and neighbors, even though they had more money than they knew what to do with? So what enticed Zacchaeus to make a career choice guaranteeing excommunication from his own people?

Here’s one possible explanation. Maybe Zacchaeus was bullied when he was a kid and his career choice was pay back. The old saying, “I don’t get mad I get even,” could apply here. So it’s possible Zacchaeus’ motivation for being a Roman tax collector came from being aggressively bullied, so now he’d aggressively bully back and his authority as a tax collector gave him tremendous leverage.

Ironically, the more Zacchaeus abused his power the more hated and isolated he became. He was caught in a vicious cycle of his own making.

Of course, this is purely speculation, Luke says nothing about Zacchaeus’ motivations and agendas; but I think this explanation is worth consideration as we also consider our own brokenness and isolation from God and others.

One of the things we need to remember is before these old stories in the Bible can speak to us we must first enter into the story until we see ourselves. The reason these stories contain both truth and power is because they’re templates of the human experience and our relationships with God and each other.

Simply put, Zacchaeus' story is our story. We are him and he is us. True, none of us are crooked tax collectors, but like Zacchaeus we've endured isolation and pain causing our own arrested development that keeps us from experiencing the full abundant life.

But there's something else, equally important, we have in common with Zacchaeus, a sense of restlessness; deep down we're not happy with the way we are. After all, who enjoys being broken? And so we try to fix ourselves, only to fail. Why? Try as we might we can't fix ourselves, we need outside help, from someone who was and is and ever shall be unbroken.

That's why Zacchaeus risked looking ridiculous and climbed up that tree. He heard about Jesus, how he healed broken bodies and spirits and welcomed outcasts and sinners into what he called the Kingdom of God. Somehow Jesus was all about transformation, a second chance at life, and Zacchaeus, sick and tired of being isolated and broken wondered if Jesus could put him back together again plus bring him back into the community.

So, with nothing to lose and everything to gain Zacchaeus climbed up that tree hoping something good would come out of it.

And it did. Somehow Jesus was drawn to the little man perched up in that sycamore tree and to everyone's surprise he called up and said, "Zacchaeus, come down from there, I'm coming to your house for lunch."

Quickly Zacchaeus climbed down, honored to be singled out, especially since he was shunned by everyone else. Of course everyone else was stunned. "Why is Jesus going to his house? He's a sinner!" But that's precisely why Jesus invited himself to his house, to issue the invitation to new life.

Well, you know the rest of the story. Zacchaeus experienced grace and unconditional love. Mind you, Jesus didn't say, "I'll come to your house but you have to repent first." Jesus just went, accepted Zacchaeus' hospitality and treated him like a long lost brother. Zacchaeus was touched and finally moved to stand up and announce, "Lord, half of what I own I'm giving to the poor and the other half will be used to compensate everybody I cheated."

Zacchaeus wanted to quit the rat race and join the human race. He didn't want to hate and be hated any more. He was tired of being broken and resentful. He wanted to become like Jesus.

This is a story about the power of God transforming us from who we have become without Christ to who we can become through Christ. But before this transformation can begin there must be a decision for Christ. But for this transformation to continue there must be a commitment to Christ.

A pig and a chicken were walking down the road when they saw a sign reading, “Free Breakfasts for the Poor. Donations Accepted.”

The chicken looked at the pig and said, “Let’s do our good deed for the day. I’ll donate eggs and you can donate bacon.”

The pig shot back, “Sounds like you’re making a decision and expecting me to make a commitment.”

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, “I appeal to you...to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so you may discern the will of God...” (Romans 1:1-2)

I like the story about the chicken and the pig because it defines the difference between making a decision for Christ and making a commitment to Christ. Just as the pig offered up his bacon we are challenged to offer up ourselves, then right our wrongs, like Zacchaeus, but to also take the next step, again like Zacchaeus, and become a transformational presence where ever God puts you.

That’s what being committed to Christ is really all about, being a Christ-like presence in your homes, as husbands and wives, parents, siblings and children. In the work place, your commitment to Christ compels you to be either a loyal employer or a loyal employee, being truthful, authentic and helpful in your professional relationships. As Christian professionals you want to do and be your best for your clients, customer, and students.

One more thing, being a Christ-like presence doesn’t mean you just give off the top, or your leftovers. Remember the chicken and the pig. The pig was asked to sacrifice himself while the chicken was only willing to give her eggs.

Discipleship and stewardships are two sides of the same coin. Like love and marriage you can’t have one without the other. Both serious disciples and serious stewards are committed to nurturing themselves and then giving themselves away. The disciple, because being one means denying yourself of anything that short circuits your relationship with God and your neighbor and living as much as you are able like Jesus. The steward, because being one means you understand everything you are and have belongs to God and your job is to manage your life, talents and treasure for Christ and his kingdom.

I believe Zacchaeus understood this. We don’t know the intimate details of the conversation Jesus and Zacchaeus had over lunch. Maybe a lot was said about Zacchaeus’ past with expressions of remorse and Jesus responding with kindness and understanding. Maybe nothing was said, or had to be said, because being in Christ’s presence Zacchaeus carried on a silent inner conversation with himself until he realized his heart was miraculously changing right then and there. It was at that moment

Zacchaeus astounded everybody, including himself by promising to give back what he gouged from his neighbors.

You see, Zacchaeus went through a conversion that brought about his liberation. Zacchaeus was free from his broken isolated existence and was no longer afraid of his neighbors, being poor, maybe even being short. Over lunch with Jesus Zacchaeus became a new man.

As we come to the table to share this sacred meal with Jesus, maybe it's time for you and I like Zacchaeus to have inner conversation with ourselves, knowing Jesus is with us watching and listening and encouraging us to embrace our freedom in Christ.

May God bless and keep us all under his authority and grace so we can be encouraged to continue our journey of transformation as we offer up ourselves to God and our neighbor for Christ and his Kingdom.