

Jesu Juva

“A Tree-Climbing Sinner; A Tree-Climbing Saviour”

Text: Luke 19:1-10 (Isaiah 1:10-18)

Zacchaeus was a wee little man, and a wee little man was he. Most of us learned that song as children. But there's more to Zacchaeus than meets the eye. You see, Zacchaeus wasn't only short in stature, but short in character and probably short in self-esteem. Short in character because he had most probably earned his wealth from extorting and defrauding it from others because of his position as chief tax collector. And short in self-esteem because tax collectors were hated and shunned and considered just about the worst kind of people in Israel at that time. They made the IRS today - even when you're being audited - look good. So Zacchaeus was, in *many* ways I think, *a wee little man*.

What he *wasn't* wee in was money. He was rich. But his riches don't seem to have been enough for him. For when Jesus comes to his town, he wants to go see who this guy is. . . . Why? Maybe because he heard that Jesus befriends tax collectors and sinners and doesn't shun and hate them.

So Zacchaeus climbs a tree to see Jesus. Which is quite ridiculous, really. Rich men don't climb trees. Businessmen in expensive suits and imported shoes don't climb trees. Children climb trees. But Zacchaeus climbs a tree, *for the Lord he wanted to see*, right? That's how the song goes. But maybe, Zacchaeus didn't just want to see *but to be seen*. To be seen by this one who befriends tax collectors and sinners and doesn't shun and hate them. Who might even befriend . . . him.

And that's exactly what happens. And no accident that, I would say. Jesus sees this ridiculous little rich man up a tree and as so often happens, Jesus' heart goes out to him. Jesus has compassion on him. Jesus sees yet another sheep without a shepherd and wants to be his shepherd. So Jesus calls out to him: ***Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.***

Don't hurry over that line before noting how remarkable it is. First, Jesus calls Zacchaeus by name. Jesus knows who he is. Zacchaeus is not just another nameless face in the crowd. He is known by Jesus. And so are you. It's easy to feel forgotten and lost in the crowd among the thousands living here at Greenspring, or in your school, at your work, or in your community. But Jesus knows you and knows your name. He called you by name in Holy Baptism and made you His own. For He wants to be your shepherd, too. That you be not harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd, but one of His flock, in His care and keeping, in His feeding and protection.

Hurry and come down. Don't stay where you're at. Come and receive the gifts Jesus has come to bring. *For I must stay at your house today*, Jesus says. ***I***, the God of creation in

human flesh; **must**, this is necessary for me, this is exactly what Jesus has come to do; **stay**, or abide, to grace you with my presence; **at your house**, Jesus comes to us in our need; He doesn't command that we clean ourselves up and make ourselves right and make an arduous journey to Him - He comes to us; **today**. This *today* was going to be a day unlike any other day for Zacchaeus. This *today* would change everything for him. *Today* He will be made a new man. *Today*, as Jesus will say, **salvation has come to this house**. And not just salvation to eternal life, but salvation to a new life even now. To the life Zacchaeus went looking for when he climbed that tree.

Now the crowd, we are told, grumbled at that. **He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner**. Yes. Precisely. But not only that day, but every day of His life. This is who Jesus is: the God who has come to live with sinners. To live in our world, to come to our houses, to abide in our churches. Everywhere sinners are, that's where Jesus is. To bring us salvation. To bring us the new lives that we need.

And He did it by Himself climbing a tree. The tree of the cross. To be seen by us. That we see the love of God for us. And just as Jesus told Zacchaeus to come down from the tree that He might bring salvation to Him, so Jesus would not come down from His tree - even though *many* yelled at Him to come down - in order to bring salvation to us. He *must* stay. He *must* die. For in His death is our life. In His staying is our freedom. For in Jesus' death and then resurrection - not His coming down from the cross but His coming up from the grave - salvation has come not just to a house, but to the world. To you and to a whole world of Zacchaeus'.

That today was a new day for Zacchaeus. It changed his whole life. I think if you knew Zacchaeus before and after, you wouldn't recognize the man he had become. His stinginess changed to love. His extorting and defrauding turned to generosity. But that's what happens when **your sins are like scarlet** and then are **white as snow**. When **they are red like crimson** and then **become like wool**. When the sin that weighs you down is taken away; when hatred and shunning are replaced with love and forgiveness. When you have a Good Shepherd.

Maybe you know a Zacchaeus. Maybe you've been a Zacchaeus. Maybe you've been part of the crowd that grumbled and complained at what Jesus was doing, how He was doing His job, what kind of people He was welcoming into His family, into His church. Maybe, like me, *all of the above* at some point or another. However it is with you *today*, Jesus is here for you *today*, to give you a new *today*. To abide at your house, in your life, and make it a *today* filled with His forgiveness and grace. To wash you of your sins, to feed you with His Body and Blood, and satisfy your every need. For He knows your name too. That *you may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom, in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness*.

For truly there are no *wee little men* in Jesus' sight. Only great big sinners that He wants

to befriend and make sons of God. And He has. Until that day when Jesus comes again and calls out Zachaeus' name, and your name again, from the Book of Life. That day when He will not come to abide with us in our houses, but when He comes to take us to His. Forever.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.