

Church at Home: A Reflection for 17th October 2021

Gospel reading: Luke 19: 1-9 **Zaccheus climbs a tree: A good day!**

The story of Zacchaeus, the tax collector who wanted to see Jesus, is full of wonderful detail and emotions. It encapsulates the gospel of Jesus in just a few short verses.

Imagine Zacchaeus, “small of stature”, excited because he has heard that Jesus is coming, curious to know more, determined not to miss out. He finds a space, a tree branch on which to perch up high, near the road, so that he won't miss seeing this teacher and healer who is coming to Jericho. Clinging to the tree branch ... and Jesus sees him! Surely that must have caused even more excitement. Zacchaeus has been noticed! We are told that he receives Jesus joyfully, bringing Jesus to his own house.

I imagine that Zacchaeus would have scrambled to find some food and drink for the unexpected visitor, offering him a seat and water, perhaps a bowl for washing his dusty feet, which was common practice. Was there a Mrs. Zaccheus who bustles around to put together a meal? Equally curious neighbours who crowd in?

Some people mutter because, they say, “Jesus has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” Tax collectors were particularly despised for being complicit with the occupying Roman force, so Zacchaeus probably was not well liked or trusted in the neighbourhood. Rich he might have been, but not popular, not a friend to many. This makes Jesus' choice of this man and this house to visit all the more remarkable.

Bring yourself into the story... would you push through the crowds on the off chance of seeing this Jesus? Or would that be too much effort? Would you joyfully welcome a stranger into your home? Or would that be too scary, or maybe just too inconvenient? And which of us would be able to say, with Zacchaeus, that we give generously to the poor, and furthermore, recognise our sinfulness, and want to make amends?

It is a wonderful day for the tax collector. Having encountered Jesus, he responds with openness, with joy, and with repentance. Jesus, too, must have felt some joy – he too has been seen, and understood. Clearly Jesus' teaching to “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand” is exemplified in this encounter. So often Jesus is misunderstood, his message is not heard, his followers get it wrong. But on this day in Jericho, understanding and repentance and joy come from an unlikely encounter with an unlikely person – a good day for Zacchaeus AND for Jesus!

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