

From the Rector's Study, the Rev. Bryce Sangster

Sunday, October 30th, 2022, Pentecost XXI

Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4, Psalm 119:137-144, 2 Thess 1:1-4, 11-12, Luke 19:1-10

T I think Zacchaeus gets a bit of a bad rap. The same way I think Judas gets a bad rap as well [that's a whole other sermon].

This may be rationalizing, but Zacchaeus is part of the Roman system. The system was set up for the tax collector to be the bad guy. The amount of the tax owed to Rome was never communicated. This means the tax collector was paid from the amount of taxes he could collect over and above what was owed to Rome. In other words, if \$100 was owed to Rome the tax collector had to remit the \$100 to Rome. Anything over the \$100 the tax collector was able to collect with his to keep.

So, there was no way for the payee knowing how much was actually owed to Rome and so the tax collector could collect any amount he could get.

This reminds me of poker players and salesmen. They are able to read the rest of us and understand our strengths and weaknesses, our hopes and fears. So, Zacchaeus as a successful chief tax collector is able to play the system. And is able to not only keep Rome happy but get rich in the process. This reminds me of the comment at the end of the parable of the dishonest manager when he says:

And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly, for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. Luke 16 eight.

It is not surprising Zacchaeus when Jesus invites himself to his place for dinner responds in the manner that he did. He offers to make restitution or becoming rich on the backs of those he extracted taxes from. Interestingly Jesus doesn't ask for this it doesn't make it a condition of him coming to dinner, but it shows what are relationship to Jesus is all about. Perhaps bringing out the best in all of us. And that we can change, each one of us.

Is there some kind of modern equivalent to Zacchaeus today? There are people today able to get rich without producing anything, just by moving money around. They are not viewed as traitors on the side of Rome because the only side they're on making money for themselves. And yet they receive some kind of worldly respect and have undue influence. but it's not about us and them but for us to realize there is a little bit of Zacchaeus in all of us.

All of us are invited into a relationship with God in Christ and to be part of the community. It is with no strings attached. It is unconditional love. So the challenge is for us to continue our journey of faith in fully understanding in heart and mind that God loves us unconditionally and that we can move towards loving ourselves and each other in a more unconditional way.

Amen

May the love which overcomes all differences
which heals all wounds
which puts to flight all fears
which reconciles all who are separated
be in us and among us, now and always, Amen.
And the blessing of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be upon you this day and for ever more. Amen.
(Source: Malcolm Doney, *All Hallows on the Wall*)