

How Short was Zacchaeus?

Thirty-First Week in Ordinary time- October 30, 2016 – Luke 10:1-10

So how short was Zacchaeus? I'm a visual person so I have in my head that he was pretty short in stature. St. Luke uses this visual to illustrate the truth that is at the heart of this gospel story. Zacchaeus' size is a hook for the reader to consider as we try to understand the challenges that come with being short in character and shortsighted in our understanding and love of God and others.

“Now a man there named Zacchaeus, who was the chief tax collector and also a wealthy man, was seeking to see who Jesus was; but he could not see him because of the crowd, for he was short in stature.”

What the listeners of Luke's story would have known then is that if Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector and a wealthy man he probably had accomplished those two labels from dishonest business practices and the cheating of many in the crowd that surrounded him. People knew who he was and they probably did not like him. They would have been careful not to cross him for fear of his retaliation the next time taxes were due.

So we have this very interesting story of a crooked tax collector, who has pocketed his share of the interest he charges, but now for some reason seems to be seeking out Jesus. **“So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus, who was about to pass that way.”** This advantage point also had to be of great risk to him because he would have been on display to all those who he has cheated in the past.

“Jesus looked up and said, ‘Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house.’ Jesus does the opposite of the crowd. They grumbled and complained that Jesus **“has gone to stay at the house of a sinner.”** Instead of a reprimand, Jesus greets him with great love. Here the sinner, the man of short stature and character, has encountered the living God who extends to him the promise of redemption and salvation.

The growth that comes in this story is not about Zacchaeus growing taller, but rather, it is about the growth in his integrity. It is his conversion and his love of Christ that expands and changes him. **“And he came down quickly and received him with joy.”** Zacchaeus has found the very thing that fills him more fully than the love of money and power. He has discovered the mercy, love and acceptance of God through Jesus. In his conversion, he sees his wicked practices and immediately promises a change in behavior and restitution to those he has wronged.

God has created each of us. God loves us in spite of our shortcomings. We can joyfully receive what Jesus proclaims today. **“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost.”**

Blessings!


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