

## 31<sup>ST</sup> Sunday OT – Luke 19:1-10

### *Zacchaeus*

Having arrived in Jericho, Jesus is almost in Jerusalem, the goal of his journey, Luke now gives us one of his best stories. Zacchaeus is a chief tax collector and a rich man.

Both of these we have met before. Tax collectors flocked to John the Baptist for baptism, sat at table with Jesus and even featured in his parables. The rich in the story so far have all been warnings. The rich fool put his grain into barns, died and lost everything. Dives spent his money on clothes and food, did not see Lazarus at his gate, and found himself in hell. We remember Jesus' warning, "Woe to you who are rich."

Zacchaeus was determined to see Jesus and climbed a tree. Despite the crowds and his reputation as a sinner, he welcomed Jesus into his house. Like the shepherds of Bethlehem and the good thief, he accepted his "today" of salvation. Like Martha, he had Jesus as his guest. He seems to be another example of the hopeless and the outcast who found deliverance by meeting Jesus. In him, what was impossible for men, proved possible for God; a rich man was saved

But was Zacchaeus already leading a life pleasing to God? He said, "I give half my goods to the poor and I restore four-fold if I have cheated anyone." Had he been doing this all along? If so, he is an example of the correct use of wealth. The good Samaritan used his oil, wine, and beast to give help to the injured man. Mark's mother and her servant welcomed Peter into her house. Lydia, the wealthy purple cloth merchant, gave hospitality to Paul. Jesus does not demand of all to, "Sell all you have and give it to the poor." Jesus does warn the crowd not to judge and condemn out of prejudice.

I want to touch on three points from today's gospel. The first is the meaning of Zacchaeus' name, which ironically means, "Clean" in Hebrew. Yes, *clean*, and not unclean as the crowd considered him. This is how God sees us and not as the crowd sees us. The reason why his name is important is because it give us a clue of how he sees himself. Zacchaeus' reply to the crowd is in the *present tense* in the original Greek, even

though some translations have it in the future tense like *Give Us This Day*. "I give...I repay." This is the second point, in other words, Zacchaeus is already doing what he says, not promising to do it in the future. He is arguing that he is not a sinner because it is his customary conduct to be generous and just.

The third point, is that Jesus says, "Today, salvation has come to this house..." The **presence** of Jesus makes possible what is humanly impossible. A wealthy man gets through the needle's eye! Some writers point out that the future tense of Zacchaeus' reply reduces the depth of the saving statement of Jesus. For it says that Zacchaeus has achieved salvation on his own and makes Jesus extraneous to salvation. Even so, this is not a good reason for changing the original to the future tense.

For Luke, salvation means restoration to wholeness, rescue from sin and alienation from God and also includes a dimension of immanence or **presence**: in Jesus God is present with sinners; Jesus saves from destructive self-isolation to union with nurturing human community.

We gather each Sunday because of our faith community, which nurtures us in Christ through each other, through the presence of Jesus in each other. A faith community that tries to see each other as God sees us; clean and non-judgmental. Jesus brings the dimension of presence when two or three are gathered and through the Word of God and in his body and blood.

Luke in today's gospel by points out that Zacchaeus climbed the sycamore tree. This tree grows by flowing water, usually along rivers, in this case the River of Living Water. What a powerful symbol for us as community, a sycamore tree, as we gather each Sunday to drink of this Water of Life as a community, the life of Christ that sustains us this week in our spiritual journey in this world. May we bring the immanent presence of Christ to others through our words and deeds this week.