

Sunday, November 3, 2019 – Twenty First Sunday after Pentecost/All Saints' (Observed)
“Saints and Sinners”

Luke 19: 1-10

Rev. Derek S. Klemm, Mountain View Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV

Story Applied

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Jericho was no stranger to big time people. Down below sea level and a brief 15 or so miles from Jerusalem it was a convenient winter getaway for the likes of King Herod at his winter palace. On this day a crowd fit for a king surrounds Jesus. His long winding trek from the northern areas of Samaria and Galilee are coming to an end as he nears Jerusalem. His fame is at its peak and the crowd presses in, a chance for many to marvel, to catch a glimpse, to just get a chance to see... Jesus.

Among the crowd is a man short in stature... if not in status. A tax collector. In fact, the chief tax collector. A wealthy man. He, like the crowd... the crowd, likely full of people much less wealthy than he, just wants to see Jesus. Badly. He so wants to see who Jesus is. It would have been normal for people of lower means to defer to those of higher status on such rare and special occasions as the arrival of this Jesus, just passing through but not all is as it appears to be.

Zacchaeus, the name of this man short in stature is in fact *even* shorter in status than in height, in the eyes of the crowd. Sure he has wealth but it is wealth gained disreputably. He collected taxes for the Romans. Check that... he *supervised* the traitors collecting taxes for the Romans, counting their take, setting their quotas, turning up the heat when they didn't take enough. In the process he got rich. He got kickbacks on the kickbacks. He's a collaborator's collaborator. That's how the crowds see it. Peering at the holy man, the miracle worker, the prophet, Jesus? Survey says: that's not for sinners. Everyone in the crowd is more deserving than Zacchaeus.

Desperate to see Jesus Zacchaeus runs ahead. Already shamed in the eyes of the community anyway, why not add climbing a tree to the list. No self-respecting man of means, a short one at that, would disgrace himself in such a way but Zacchaeus, with all his wealth and all his shame needs to see who Jesus is.

Of course, he's right. He does need Jesus. Zacchaeus wanted to see who Jesus is and Jesus is going to show him. He's going to go to Zacchaeus' house, stay where he lives, eat at his table. Surprising – horror is more like it. Unseemly? You bet. Almost as unseemly as God deigning to take on human flesh with all its limitations and temptations. God, nine months in a womb, through a birth canal and then nursing. God having His diaper changed. God circumcised, God with scraped knees, God with the stomach flu. God made His dwelling among us – Mary's womb, a feeding trough in a barn, in Egypt, in Nazareth and in so many houses – Peter's mother-in-law, Mary & Martha's, at Matthew's, another tax collector with all his tax collector friends – and now at Zacchaeus' place.

If Vegas is the city of "Elvis slept here" then Christianity is the religion of "Jesus slept here." Check that – "Jesus lives here – among us." Yes, Jesus is here! He goes to shocking, horrific, unseemly places – and yes that includes scantily-clad places and flophouses but also other places, too. Where else? Like your bedroom and the fight you had with your spouse. Like your living room and the gossip that took place there with your friends. Like your car and the disregard for traffic laws that took place therein. Like your texts and the things you'd rather die than to have someone else see that you said or did. And Jesus is not just here with you but with all the other Zacchaeus' and all the other you's and me's of the world like unaware infants, repentant rappers, skeptical scientists and proud politicians. Are you any better? Am I? Jesus comes here, he insists, in fact – He must stay at your house today. So He goes right where you and I live, yes even into this body that we have and He makes His dwelling among us. Are you horrified? With sinners, you say?

Jesus makes His dwelling with sinners but He doesn't leave them where they are. Peter's mother-in-law – healed. Mary and Martha – reconciled and then later their brother Lazarus, risen from the dead. Matthew the tax collector – a disciple and later an apostle. Zacchaeus – ancient church tradition says he became a bishop, a pastor for pastors, but we don't really know for sure.

And you? Hear this: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." "Take eat, take drink... My body, My blood, given FOR YOU for the forgiveness of sin." "I announce the grace of God to all of you and in the stead and by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sin in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Here, in this place, in these things, we see Jesus. Here, we know who Jesus is.

Zacchaeus' repentance is to pay back what he earned disreputably and also help the poor but it started with God *inviting Himself in*. The same God invited Himself into your life and mine and changes us. In fact it was His mission – when Zacchaeus and Jesus met, Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, to the cross. That's why Jesus came – to seek and save what is lost. That's you, me and all the other sinners of the world that are lost and need saving. Jesus did exactly that.

God's last night among us, before the saving, was a night of chains. God went on trial. God got mocked, spit on and flogged. God lived... and died on a tree. God was left in the earth. God went everywhere we went, including into death and into the earth and then God rose to take us where He goes.

All Saints' Day is a special time to remember those promises of God. Zacchaeus was a sinner and we are sinners but God makes us saints. Saint is a word that we often think of someone of especially high spiritual status relative to the rest of us, kind of the opposite of what the crowds thought of Zacchaeus, so much lower than they were spiritually, saints are that much higher. Not so. Jesus makes us saints. Jesus makes us holy. You're a saint and I'm a saint because of what Jesus did and where He has taken us. That's where all our hope is, isn't

it? In a few minutes we'll read a list of saints – sin gone forever, who've died in the loving arms of their Savior Jesus and now they are welcomed into *His* house. And when we join around this table, His table, we join with Jesus and with them. Jesus lives here. It starts with Him coming to where we are and it finishes with Him bringing us to where He is and making us the way He is – into saints. Forgiven, resurrected, live forever in our new body saints. In Jesus' name, Amen.