

October 23, 2016 “On The Jericho Road” Pt. 2 Luke 19:1-9

Why all the sudden concern about the Jericho Road? And what does it have to do with Zachaeus in the first place? Well...the insight actually has to do with Belleville, and Stirling, and Madoc. Approximately 10 years ago, I was driving from Trenton to Belleville and I noticed something that I thought was singularly a feature of Southern Ontario, in contrast to the Northern part of our province. Turns out I was wrong about that...but this feature is so much more obvious in Southern Ontario because there are so many more communities: cities, towns and villages.

Here is the core of the insight. Highway 401 sails by Trenton and Belleville. But if you are driving the historic Highway 2 two things occur. Entering Trenton, the highway becomes a city street. In Belleville, Highway 2 becomes Dundas Street. In many cities and towns and villages the highway becomes Main Street, and if you stay with it, eventually it feeds you out the other side of the community. And that is part of what is going on in the first verse of Luke chapter 19. Continuing on from the healing in which the blind man received his sight, we are continuing to travel the highway of the time...The Jericho Road. And the first point Luke shares with us in the continuing history of Jesus ministry is that Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through.

I don't know what the name of the street was in Jericho but it is a throughway. The Jericho Road brought Jesus to the historic city. And Jesus was passing through. Hold to this street and it will take Him and His followers out the other side. And Luke insinuates that that was the plan. Jesus was not planning on a stay in Jericho. The disciples were not expecting they would spend the night, or dine there, or attend a reception, or participate in a party. They are

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passing through on their way to Jerusalem. Luke at least thought that was the plan. Pass through. Continue the journey.

One thing is certain. We are now transported onto the main street of Jericho, because we were on the Jericho Road. It leads into the city. It leads through the city. It leads out the other side of the city or at least it did in Jesus time. The Jericho Road brings us here in Luke 19. The Jericho Road brought Jesus, the twelve and his following crowd to this point during the journey to Jerusalem. They have left Galilee. They are going to Jerusalem. Jesus will never return or walk this way again.

Big surprise! The Jericho Road, or Main Street or whatever it is actually called, is the place where the 12 and Jesus, and the crowd that journeys with HIM get to physically see the impact of the time in ministry spent in the towns and villages of Galilee. Verse 2 tells us a number of things but this is the key detail, a crowd has turned out in Jericho to see Jesus. He is being followed by a hundred or so very committed followers. But Main Street Jericho is lined with people who have heard the news on the wind...Jesus is coming. Jesus of Nazareth is passing through. We know it was not the blind man that spread the word...no longer blind...he is part of the crowd following Jesus and praising God! Jesus reputation has preceeded HIM. The people of Jericho have turned out just to catch a glimpse of the Man from Nazareth.

This episode introduces us to my favourite character touched by the ministry of Jesus. The man's name is Zachaeus. He is my favourite for the simple reason he is short. I have spent a life time being short. If you are short you get to public events early so that you can pick your spot for the simple reason you know it is

going to be difficult to see what is happening. The problem for Zachaeus is he is a busy business man. He is the chief tax collector in Jericho. And that means he is wealthy. And he is wealthy because he is creative. He knows where and who and how to squeeze people in order to make the quota the Romans anticipate will come from that city. But even more important than that, he knows who and how and where to squeeze so that he makes profits...significant profits. And yes, there is more than a little suggestion that he takes more than he should in order to sustain his personal lifestyle. In fact the Roman system of tax gathering depends on the success of men like Zachaeus.

One of the ways that Zach's creativity comes out is how he handles the situation on Main Street Jericho that particular day. He left the office late. He barely made it to Main Street in time to see Jesus, and therein lies his problem. He cannot see Jesus at all because the crowd in front of him is made up for the most part of people who are taller than he. If Zachaeus is anything he is a determined man. He is not used to taking no for an answer. He thinks outside the box. He spots a sychamore fig tree and he runs ahead of the procession...Jesus, the twelve, the hundred or so followers...and he climbs up into the tree. It makes perfect sense. He has...not a front row seat...but a private box in the balcony. He knows he will see more than the average person below him. And he can relax. No one is liable to try and put a knife in his back up here. He knows he is not liked. He knows in fact he is hated. In this tree he is safe and secure.

One of the realities of life is there are always surprises. One of the realities of living in a world in which the Lord God of Israel exists, is that you are never unseen. Both of those realities

burst into Zachaeus life as he makes himself comfortable on the limb of that sychamore tree, where he feels he is in control and able to see, and yet almost invisible. Excitement! He spots Jesus! And then Jesus turns from the shouting, singing, welcoming crowds and looks Zachaeus right in the eyes. Zachaeus might have blushed at that...but before he could react...he hears Jesus call his name... “Zachaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today!” Jesus eyes see everything. Jesus smile is....disarming. Before Zachaeus knows what he is doing, he climbs down, and he welcomes Jesus, to Jericho and his home.

This is a big moment for Zachaeus. I mean, it is so public. Everyone can see and everyone heard Jesus call his name and announce that he needs hospitality with Zachaeus as host. It is the most positive experience Zachaeus has ever had in his career. And he probably heard some of the muttering about Jesus going to the home of a sinner. And if he heard it, then Jesus heard it. And yet Jesus treats him like a long lost friend. Gentle. Joy. And those eyes that seem to see into the heart of his soul and mind.

If we take Luke seriously, what happens next does not happen after lunch has been served or over a second bottle of wine. It happens right here under a sychamore tree. It happens as they stand on Main Street Jericho...the continuation of the Jericho Road, the route which is at one and the same time, the way into Jericho and the way out of Jericho to Jerusalem. It is like that story about the woman at the well who said come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done. Just that suddenly, Zachaeus knows that Jesus knows everything. And under the kind gaze of Jesus Zachaeus' heart melts. His soul finds its home in God. And all he can think is that he must do the right thing, the honest thing, he must do what

God would want him to do, he must be the man God loves, Jesus loves.

He confesses his sin. “Look Lord. Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” And he does not say it as an expression of regret at being busted, but there are tears of excitement in his eyes because he has never felt like this before...so...clean. Jesus says to him in that gentle voice of his “Today, salvation has come to this house, because this man too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save, what was lost.”

Some of that message was meant for Zachaeus. Certainly salvation has come to this house. But some of those words were meant for people who were muttering. Maybe even some of the disciples of Jesus. Certainly for some of the residents of Jericho who were standing so close they could hear every word and every syllable. Jesus declares Zachaeus has been saved...based on his words, his passionate embrace of a new life, his doing what he declares. “Here and now, I give half of what I have to the poor. Here and now I make restitution to those I have cheated.” Jesus declares that Zachaeus knows God...he is a son of Abraham. Zachaeus' faith is real. Jesus declares himself the Son of Man...the Messiah for whom Israel has been looking, concerning whom the prophets foretold. And Jesus declares what the business of the Kingdom is under HIS Messiahship...seeking and saving that which was lost.

I do not understand how currents of theology could go so off the tracks. God's Messiah, the Son of Man...the redeemer for whom human hearts hunger. And the high and holy purpose of the

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movement that emerges from the cross and the open tomb by the grace of God...seeking and saving the lost. We continually need to be reminded we are only the redeemed, because our eyes were opened and we saw how lost we were...and it is Jesus who opens our eyes.

Over dessert, I suggest there was probably a lovely conversation that went something like this. “He asked me what I wanted. I said I wanted to see. And Jesus said, your faith has made you whole. And here I am!” That's the blind man. And Zachaeus replies, “He looked inside me. He saw everything. He said he needed to come to my house. And I knew what I had to do.” There is such clarity on the Jericho Road.

Let us pray;

Lord you created us. And you save us when we are lost. Your love cleanses and changes everything. Help us to live this truth and to celebrate what you do when you come and live with us. Amen.