

July 29, 2018 The Guest Pt. 6 Luke 19:1-10

There are not a lot of advantages to being short if you want to see what is going on in a crowd. I know this...because I am short these days. You may well say, that is a strange way to put it! However, I am convinced that I was not always short. When I played football for the Lakeview High School Lions in Port Arthur back in 1959, I was not the shortest player on the team. In fact with a few notable exceptions, as I remember it, most of the team was close to my height. And I make this observation. Sitting in the Food Court at Quinte Mall, I notice that the world has changed.

The young people, I mean the teen agers of this current generation, all seem to be taller than I am. There may be a few exceptions. I have not done a scientific poll. But I observe that there are a lot of young people out there whom I see, and my reaction is, they would make great basketball players. I played football in my teens. I always had trouble getting a basketball up to the hoop. Lay ups were a disaster for me. I was short. Even when I jumped I was way below the hoop. It seems to me to be obvious...they are building this generation a lot taller than God made us. I have a lot of sympathy for Zacchaeus. That name is spelled with 2 c's. But the Gospel writer is very specific about this point. Zacchaeus (with 2 c's) was a very short man.

Like me he could not see the action, from the 4th row back from the curb. It seemed the world was taller than he

was. In fact the reality of his shortness was so embedded in his own mind that when the news spread that Jesus was passing through town, Zacchaeus knew he would never get to see Jesus if all he did was take a place, as little as 18 inches square in the gathering crowd. He was wealthy. He was the chief tax collector in the famous city of Jericho. And he had not made his fortune, or built his career, by denying reality. Facts are after all, facts. Zacchaeus was short. So he ran ahead of the procession that was following Jesus, he got ahead of the curve, ahead of the gathering throngs of people...and he took a front row seat in the balcony. He climbed a sycamore tree. A sycamore that bore figs. He was probably quite proud of himself. It had been part of his business plan as chief tax collector in Jericho. You gotta be creative...if you wanna make a fortune. Or, if you are short and wealthy and want to see Jesus passing through Jericho on the way to Jerusalem.

Think of it! Zacchaeus can see everything from his balcony seat! He can see the people gathering and running to the curb to try to see Jesus. He can see the people standing on tippy toes, trying to see Jesus. He can see the disciples, enjoying the reception that they are getting here in Jericho. He can even see by the rate at which Jesus is leading HIS crowd, that they do not plan to stay. They are passing through, on their way, to Jerusalem. Good planning never fails. Zacchaeus had figured out what the fastest way through Jericho was. He had picked his spot....he could see everything.

And he was totally surprised by what happened next! He saw Jesus look his way. That's not surprising. He is the only man in a tree on the street. He saw Jesus laugh. That was not a surprise either. What was surprising was that Jesus walked over and stopped right there, below his balcony perch. What was surprising was that Jesus called him by name. He almost lost his grip on the branch that he was using to secure his hold...like a hand rail. "Zacchaeus," Jesus called up to him, "Come down here, right now. I need to stay at your house today." Wowzoosa! Can you believe that? He's just been asked to walk with Jesus in what has turned out to be a parade. He has just been invited to talk with Jesus. Did the crowd "boo" as he joined Jesus and HIS party? It says in verse 7 "all the people began to mutter, 'Jesus has gone to be the guest of a sinner!'" When the Commissioner of the NHL, Gary Bettman is introduced to present an award, or the Stanley Cup, the crowd boos. Zacchaeus got the same kind of reaction when he suddenly became so visible, at the side of Jesus.

The fact is there are a whole bunch of things that are simply marvelous about this story. Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem. It is his 3rd trip to the capital. But this time it is a one way trip. It is the last time that Jesus is passing through Jericho on the way to the holy city. And then there is this whole thing about Jesus being a guest at the house of Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus did not invite Jesus. He would never ever been so bold. For heaven's sake Zacchaeus just climbed a tree to make sure he could see Jesus. But Jesus changed

everything. Jesus said, "I must stay at your house today." Jesus invited HIMSELF! Nowhere else in the Gospel accounts does such a thing occur. And the word must... "I must stay at your house today." It is destiny, man. Luke says Zacchaeus welcomed Jesus gladly. He bubbled. He laughed. Wahoo!!

Words are important. It was not a 5 minute housecall. Jesus said, I must stay. As I said, words are important. Lunch or dinner? That takes time. For that you need food. You need wine. And it is not just Jesus, there is HIS crowd to be included. Lots of food. A significant supply of wine. Suddenly this is a celebration. Zacchaeus stands from where he has been sitting or kneeling or reclining at the table and he makes an announcement. He turns to Jesus and he says, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor."

Can you believe it? He has made his career, and his fortune by gouging every shekel he could get out of the poor. He has proven that you actually can get a drop of blood out of a stone. And then Zacchaeus says, "And if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four (count them) four times the amount." That is double what the Law requires. Check out Exodus 22:4&7. Zacchaeus is setting a whole new standard for making past wrongs, right. This is not payback...it is generosity...it is grace,... like the grace of God.

The best commentary on Zacchaeus's declaration is the commentary of Jesus. "Today salvation has come to this

house...for this man (that is Zacchaeus spelled with 2 c's,) he too, is a son of Abraham.” Did you really hear what Jesus said? He did not simply say. Zacch has made a good set of choices. He is saved. What Jesus says is so generous we usually do not dare to mention it. “Salvation has come to this house!” It will touch everyone who lives inside these walls, or dines inside these walls, or visits inside these walls. I am saying Jesus declaration is so generous, so gracious, so giving and loving...orthodox religion does not dare to comment upon it. Jesus did. Jesus immediately added... “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

In a perverse way, we have a tendency to think Jesus could not have meant what HE said. It makes salvation too easy. It makes the generosity of God too generous. Surely there must be visible evidence of faith, before the grace of God can be tasted. Do you see what the implications of that are? Do we really mean to say our works, our deeds earn us a portion at least of the grace of God? I don't think so.

Perhaps this is an old man's sin. But the longer I live the more generous it seems to me, God is. Jesus is the word of God made flesh. Here HE is, about to leave after lunch at Zacchaeus's house to go to Jerusalem where within a week HE will be arrested, tried and crucified. And HE knows what is going to happen. He has said it so many times. The love of God does not redeem the deserving. They said, Jesus was going to

eat at the house of a sinner. The critics overlooked that is the only kind of house in which Jesus could ever dine in this world!

“The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” Zacchaeus gets saved because of what Jesus did. Salvation comes to our homes, not because of what we do, but because of what Jesus has done. Calvary. The cross. The open and empty tomb. What a Saviour! What a Lord and God! What a marvelous guest.

Let us pray;

Lord Jesus forgive us when we are quick to judge brothers and sisters, neighbours and friends, and especially strangers whom we do not know. YOUR word reminds us that YOUR heart bleeds for people we would leave outside, and with whom we would not share. Open our eyes we pray to the generous nature of your saving grace. Remind us that you have redeemed not because we are good, but because we too are the lost. Amen