

## **October 30 – All Saints Day**

Salvation Has Come

Luke 19:1-10

Luke uses the term “today” eleven times in his Gospel, often for dramatic emphasis. Today is born in the city of David. Today this scripture has been fulfilled. Today you will be with me in paradise. From his birth to the beginning of his ministry to his death, Luke lets us know that God is on the move bringing change and renewal.

Zacchaeus was a tax collector. For many, that was all you had to say. Tax collectors were outcasts. Rome found local people to collect the prescribed indirect taxes such as tolls and tariffs. You bid for the job. If your bid was accepted you paid Rome up front. You then collected your taxes with the hope that the amount you received was greater than the amount you paid. Not surprising, this system was open to abuse. You bid low, charged excess fees to the populace and got very rich. Tax collectors were assumed to be dishonest and hated by other Jews for their complicity with the Romans.

You can imagine the glee of the populace when they saw Zacchaeus running down the road and climbing a tree to get a peek at Jesus. It was considered undignified to run, even more, to climb a tree. I am sure there were jeers and smirks to see this important man up in a tree. Then Jesus stops in front of Zacchaeus. I am sure the crowd was waiting for Jesus to denounce him for being the terrible sinner that he was. Instead, Jesus tells him to climb down out of that tree because today, see there is that word, I am staying at your house.

You can hear the hissing of the crowd as they say, “tax collector.” No one would eat with them. They are beyond redemption. Zacchaeus ignores them as he scrambles down from the tree for “today” has come for him. Jesus will come to his house.

The story of Zacchaeus is against the prejudice that people can't change. Who are your tax collectors? These are the people that you have relegated to some place of unforgiveness claiming they will never change. Maybe it is the drug dealer or the child molester. These are the easy ones to heap abuse upon. But it might be that cousin who

you don't like being around for a variety of reasons. You grit your teeth, expect the worse and keep your distance. Any positive word about them is greeted with skepticism. After all, people don't change, or do they? That is the Zacchaeus story.

I am reminded of a family I read about. There were three children, and the two sisters when they talked about their brother it was always with a sigh. He lived on the wild side and was always asking for money. They had found it necessary to take over their mother's finances because he was draining her savings. One day they came to the pastor saying, John had told mom that he had a new girlfriend and she had convinced him to start going to church. By their words and actions you realized that they thought it was just a phase he was going through, that he wouldn't or couldn't change. Yet the girlfriend hung around, they got married and John started visiting his mom, not for money but because he cared. Then mom had a stroke, she wanted to stay in her home but needed help. Both of her girls were working. John and his wife offered to come, as he was on disability and not working. They were suspicious. What was he after? Finally in desperation they agreed, the entire time reminding mom to be careful. It was like the people hissing at Jesus, "He's a tax collector." We will get back to John in a bit.

Zacchaeus scrambles down from the tree and with delight invites Jesus into his house. Lonely, berated Zacchaeus, who probably felt that his life was beyond redemption because everyone had told him so, now has time with Jesus. The jeers from the crowd, as he humbled himself by running ahead and climbing a tree, was now worth it. He realized his life wasn't hopeless. This situation could be redeemed. He was willing now to give away much of his wealth. It was the money that had made his collaboration with the Romans worth the insults. He was willing to pay back four fold any that he had defrauded when the law said you should pay back double. He had reached out to Jesus, been befriended and all of a sudden life is transformed. Jesus understands what has happened and says, "Today salvation has come."

Back to our friend John. He and his wife moved in and, a bit begrudgingly, the sisters had to admit that he was taking good care of mom. Mom lived a bit more than two years from the time John moved in. After she died the sisters came to the pastor all worried. They knew John had done it for the money. They were sure he was going to

demand the house or some settlement for all the time he had given to taking care of their mom. The pastor asked them to think about what might be a fair response to their brother. He helped them to realize that John had saved them all a ton of money by allowing mom to live at home instead of at a care facility. A few days later all three siblings showed up at the pastor's office. The girls' eyes were red from crying. This did not look good. Why were they there? They wanted help in convincing John to take the extra money. He said, "It was such a blessing to have this time with mom. After the years of being estranged from her and taking advantage of Dad and Mom it was a small repayment of the debt I owed to them and my sisters." He had changed. Salvation had come to him. A life was redeemed. Finally the sisters quit hissing his name but were crying at the example of love that he showed.

This story of Zacchaeus tells me that we are not to give up on people or on situations. Too often we look at things as if they are hopeless. Zacchaeus is saying to us that salvation can come to this situation. It could even happen today.

But there is a challenge to us. Like Zacchaeus we sometimes need to risk to find that salvation. If he had not put himself out to see Jesus, nothing would have happened. When we are feeling hopeless or the situation is beyond redemption we need to ask, "What does God want me to do?" We have to be open to change, to see things differently and see people differently. After encountering Jesus, all the wealth he had giving him the feeling of importance, no longer held such value for Zacchaeus. Caring about the poor, making amends, living life in a new way, this was where he would find real value. And because of that he found salvation.

Think of some the parables Jesus told. There was the one about the rich farmer who built bigger barns to find that in death none of this mattered. Or the rich man and Lazarus who thought his wealth gave him the privilege of treating people beneath him with disdain. He dies and finds his values were misplaced. Or the rich man who wants to follow Jesus but refuses to give up his wealth. Zacchaeus gets what Jesus is driving at. He now has his priorities straight.

We don't know what happened to Zacchaeus but the Orthodox Church believes that he left Jericho and became one of the followers of Jesus. They believe that he was one of the 70 sent out by Jesus. Later he was a traveling companion of Peter. Upon returning to Palestine from one of their journeys they went through Caesarea and the people there asked Peter to appoint a leader for them. Zacchaeus was appointed bishop and he lived there until his death, strengthening the Christians in that area.

So, don't give up on people. Continue to pray for them. Encourage them when they make even baby steps towards new beginnings. And when you are feeling lost or hopeless pray that God show you a way forward, and that you have the strength to take the first step on that path. For no situation and no person is beyond hope with God. Today, salvation might come.