
Zacchaeus Was A Wee Little Man

**A sermon by the Very Rev. Sam Candler
Proper 26 – Year C**

*Zacchaeus was a wee little man,
And a wee little man was he.
He climbed up in a sycamore tree,
For the Lord he wanted to see.*

*And as the Savior passed that way,
He looked up in the tree.
And he said, "Zacchaeus, you come down.
For I'm going to your house today.
For I'm going to your house today.*

That's the song we sing with our children in this holy place; and it's a song that people of all ages sing to each other everywhere, even outside church. If any of you is ever asked to deliver a story, or presentation, to a child, and if you have no idea what to say, this is your story! This is the bible story for short people.

That is to say, this is a story for *all* people. For all of us are Zacchaeus.

Like all of us, Zacchaeus started off small. But Zacchaeus had been growing; Zacchaeus had been accumulating. Zacchaeus had been cultivating a role in life that was quite large, quite tall. He was a rich man. Rich people have lots of things. Rich people have the money to have great fun in life, to go to the finest restaurants, to travel to the fun places of the world, to acquire clothes and houses and reputations.

All of us, too, are rich, to one degree or another. Many of us have accumulated a lot. Some of us have so much stuff that we build garages to keep it in. Some of us rent storage rooms down the street to keep our extra stuff in.

Our lives seem large. We are living large! Some of us have forgotten how short we can be.

One day, God willing, something happens to us. We realize that, even with all this stuff, we are missing something.

Yes, something is missing. When we begin to realize that we are missing something, we begin to realize how short we are. We have seen all the latest movies and all the latest Netflix shows, but, somehow, we haven't seen much at all. There is something out of our view.

This is a good and healthy realization, to realize, like Zacchaeus, that we can't see. There's too much in the way. Our acquisitions which we desired so earnestly, somehow now seem to be in the way. All the special maneuvers we have made to get ahead in life, are now, somehow, in the way of our life. All the ways we have used to make money, now seem to be taking something away from us.

One day, Zacchaeus came to this same point. It was on that day that he realized how short he was. After all the calculating and collecting, all the taxing –yes, all the taxing anxieties that he had taken on—he had come up short. He was short.

So he removes himself from the crowd. Maybe that way he can see something worthwhile. Maybe he can see

someone worthwhile, this Jesus figure. Oh, to see something worthwhile in this life!

Sometimes, climbing a tree provides us a better view. Sometimes a tree gives us perspective. But, for some of us, the trees are also where we hide. We climb a tree in order to get away, and not be seen, and not have to tumble about in the crowds. For Zacchaeus, maybe, he climbed a tree to see, and to not be seen.

Jesus honors both those ways that we use trees. When we pause for perspective, Jesus will look at us. And when we are trying to hide, when we are trying to hide from life, when we are trying to hide from others, when we are trying to hide from ourselves, Jesus will pause and look up. Jesus will look right at us, and say, "Come on down." Come on down and join the crowd. Come on down and be with me. In fact, I am coming to your house today."

Oh, wow, to my house? Jesus wants to come to my house? Jesus wants to eat at my house, and even stay at my house?

Something happens in that moment when we realize that Jesus wants to be with us. Whether we are rich or poor, whether we are a tax collector or a pharisee, whether we are a saint or a sinner, something happens when we realize that Jesus wants to be with us.

What happens is that we start giving stuff away. We don't need all those things we have accumulated. In fact, we may have four times as much stuff as we need. And we don't need the guilt and grief that we have accumulated over the years. We carry around four times as much guilt as need. We don't need the anxiety and fear that have grown up in us. We don't need the anxieties that tax us. We carry around four times too much anxiety. Zacchaeus said he was giving it all back. It wasn't his.

Indeed, with Jesus, we can be empty. We can give things away. We do not need to be tall. We can be short. We can be single-minded and straightforward and pure and innocent. When Zacchaeus encountered Jesus – or, that is, when Jesus encountered Zacchaeus—Zacchaeus was somehow purified. Zacchaeus became happily short, happily empty. Zacchaeus became saved. He became as free as a little child.

This Jesus, he really does bring salvation to the house of Zacchaeus, and to our houses, too. Jesus gives us the glorious peace to be able to give things away. To give away goods. To give away anxiety. To give away fear. That is salvation.

AMEN.

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