

## **WELCOME 11<sup>th</sup> October 2020 – 19 Pentecost '20 A**

Luke 19:1-10

Welcome again this morning! I'm glad you're here. I pray you experience God's grace in abundance in this brief time together. Please check our website for our weekly Zoom Bible Study times & other important information & updates.

We're continuing w/ our adapted worship...so as usual there are Group Study/Discussion resources available & maybe already in your hands. *For those on-line please make your way through the songs we've linked to this morning. We're also in the Guide Hall so you're experiencing here what we're experiencing there. Our aim is to equip you so your home becomes a place of the Spirit working leading you & those you've gathered in your homes into the fullness of God's word & his work in your lives & then out into the city to share what God has done for you.*

Remember all the great things we need to do to keep each other as safe as we can in this unending season of "the virus." Hand sanitizer. Masks. Sign in. Distance. Offering. Communion. We'll clean everything afterwards so you don't have to ;-)

"Tell me a story" How many parents end the day w/ their small children just like that? Stories. Everyone has one. Everyone tells them. No matter our age or mood...we tell stories. We string together incidents, experiences & interpretations into narratives. Cultures are infused w/ them. Generations are built on them. We live & die telling stories. & when we die people tell stories about us! Stories shape how we think about the world & live our lives. ANZAC 1<sup>st</sup> Fleet 1<sup>st</sup> Nations

There is **ONE** story that has the power to shape lives like no other: God's story as he engages your life through His Son. And NO ONE is more qualified to share that story than you. So for the next 6 weeks we'll hear stories of lives re-written by Jesus, & continue to learn how to share the on-going narrative of how he is changing us.

### ***As we move into this week...***

At some point...we've all been the "outsider." The new kid in class, the newest hire on the job, the recent arrival to a neighbourhood, country, group...We felt small, insignificant, & of little importance? We were sure we didn't measure up. We had to prove ourselves...not just to others, but to ourselves...maybe even to God? That's the common story of many in our world who feel like they don't belong & don't have a place...But out of our perceived obscurity & invisibility, Jesus calls. Jesus sees. Jesus knows who we are, & knows who we are meant to be. He already has written you into his story of life & love & joy. We'll explore & experience that together...Let's pray...then we'll get stuck into it.

### **PRAYER OF THE DAY:**

*Holy God & Father...as you breathe your Word into our hearts today, tutor us in faithfulness. Train us in the work of justice and hope. Equip us to share the life you give freely with all. Make us skilled in compassion and grace by which Jesus has rescued us from sin and death. Widen the embrace of your love through our arms and increase our boldness to proclaim the arrival of your kingdom...through Jesus Christ our Lord...Amen.*

Let's sing & then we'll hear God's Word...

### **FAITH CHAT:**

1. How has God re-written the story of your life from being an "outsider" to being one of his own?
2. What is Jesus transforming in you for his glory? Can you share that in 1 minute or less?

**VIDEO CLIP** IMMEDIATELY AFTER FAITH CHAT – "THIS IS WHY" - SET IT UP SO IT MAKES SENSE

**BIBLES**

**(Prayer after the sermon)**

***Father prepare me for whatever you require today & lead me in faith wherever you call me to go. In Jesus' Name...Amen.***

## 19 Pentecost '20 A – HIS STORY – YOUR LIFE: HIS CALL

As we read the gospels...there is a common element in the narrative & once you see it...you always see it. (according to the rules of the day) People who had no business getting close to Jesus *literally* flocked to Jesus. They could not keep away from him. A couple of examples (we'll see others in the coming weeks) Jesus & the 12 get out of the boats on the Eastern/Gentile side of the Sea of Galilee & out of the nearby graveyard a demon-possessed man spots Jesus: *When Jesus was still some distance away, the man saw him, ran to meet him, & bowed low before him.* Forget the rest of the story: Demon-possessed. Kept away from civilized society as best as possible. Afraid of Jesus' power. **RUNS** to Jesus. Blind Bartimaeus...begging alongside the Jericho road hears Jesus is walking by & yells for all he's worth for Jesus to have mercy on him. *"Be quiet!" many of the people yelled at him. But he only shouted louder, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"* Over the "shut ups" raining down on him he will not be denied & Jesus calls him over & heals him. 1 more: As Jesus wraps up the Sermon on the Mount: *Large crowds followed Jesus as he came down the mountainside. Suddenly, a man with leprosy approached Jesus & knelt before him. "Lord," the man said, "if you are willing, you can heal me & make me clean."* Lepers lived w/ the strictest social-distancing policy of all time...10 metres yelling "Unclean!" But this guy goes straight to Jesus. People who had no business getting close to Jesus literally flocked to Jesus. They could not keep away from him. Zacchaeus would have been the least popular man in Jericho. Not just a tax collector but a *CHIEF* tax collector which means he supervises other tax collectors. He's not just a Jew who volunteers to put the bite on his own people in service to the hated Roman occupiers. He puts the bite on other traitors like himself. Zac is the outsider's outsider. He probably has few friends even among those who have few friends. He was useful to the Romans, but certainly *NOT* one of them. He was despised by the Jews. Probably disowned by his family. But exactly like those other 3 & once you see it you see it all through the gospels...Cannot stay away from Jesus. *He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. So he ran ahead & climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way.*

I reckon most of the tax collectors fell into the category of "too proud to beg & too weak to dig." They couldn't find honourable work (physical limitation or something) but they could do math so they served the "dark side." Collect taxes or starve? Zac is *too short to see over the crowd* which means he's getting a few elbows to the eye-socket & some well-placed sandal-prints on the top of his toes...So he gets ahead of the mob & climbs a tree. Hoping for anonymity or setting himself up for mockery? I don't know...but...Hold the story there for a second...

Blind Bart...the Leper...Gerasene demoniac...Zac...others all know the story of their lives is riddled w/ holes. The story of their lives is written on torn paper. They live wounded burned & broken. They know they don't measure up...fit in... Their value, worth, & dignity have been defined by the past & seems written in indelible ink...unchangeable...stuck. Their past actions & choices, things done & undone have marked them for life. I don't care how rich Zac is, how many other guys he supervises, how much his Roman protective guard pats him on the head & says, "Good job," you know & I know life has cut him down to size...lopped him off at the knees...I knew a guy once who came to me & told me he had everything he ever wanted in life but as he sat in my office he wanted nothing he had. Would gladly walk away from it all if he could start over 20 years ago. Have you ever felt as if you just weren't up to what life was asking of you? The job description for "you" was just not what you wanted to do/be? So Zac runs ahead of the mob & climbs a tree. Hoping for anonymity or setting himself up for mockery or hoping for something even he doesn't understand? I don't know...but...*When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus & called him by name. "Zacchaeus!" he said. "Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today."* Jesus looks up into the tree & sees all the way into Zac's soul.

Jesus saw everything Zac saw about himself. Jesus saw everything the crowd saw in Zac. But Jesus saw *MORE*...more than a chief tax collector, rich man, man short in stature...who's been hacked down even smaller by the circumstances of his life. He saw what Zacchaeus couldn't see for himself. He saw one of his own. In the eyes of the crowd Zacchaeus is sinner...traitor... despised...lowest of the low. In his own eyes he is a disappointment...alone in the crowd...nobody...target. But in the eyes of Jesus he is Zacchaeus. He is sought, seen, & saved. He is the lost one now found. Zac, just like the others is not simply healed but invited into a relationship - conversation - intimacy - restoration. His past is erased like dew in the morning sun & all he has now is a future filled w/ hope. Jesus not only knew he was hiding up there; He knew his name, & called Zac to himself. Jesus in that instant was both King & friend. Zacchaeus thought he was looking for Jesus, but Jesus was actually looking for him! But of course...*the Son of Man came to seek & save those who are lost*

Anyone know what the 1<sup>st</sup> question asked in the Bible is? God asking, *"Adam, where are you?"* (Gen. 3:9). That's not the heart of a cop looking for a runaway criminal. It's the heart of the Father looking for a lost child. God has always been a pursuer; a search-&-rescuer. In fact, one way to read the narrative of the Scriptures is to hear it asking only one question from Genesis to Revelation: "Will you marry me?" God is

looking for a bride, a people for Himself. Rev 21:1-2 assures us God finally receives his bride: *Then I saw a new heaven & a new earth, for the old heaven & the old earth had disappeared. The sea was also gone; & I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.* The question for each of us & echoing in Zac's ears up in the tree...Will you say 'Yes'?

I love the language Jesus uses...*I must be a guest in your home today.* He doesn't ask permission. There's an immediacy & an urgency...a compulsion as if this trip to Jericho is a complete bust if Zac isn't part of the picture...as if he's the whole purpose for the trip. The words imply at least an overnight stay...like the woman at the Samaritan well in Jn 4 a brief conversation that begins *"an outsider will extend in time & impact...This is relationship - conversation - intimacy - restoration* You know the word this is: **GRACE**. Without any preparation or prior understanding or precondition just immediate & urgent & all-embracing...**GRACE** Zac, I want you in...what do you say?

*Zacchaeus quickly climbed down & took Jesus to his house in great excitement & joy.* I reckon he fell. Hits the ground w/ a thump...Bounces back up tries not to look embarrassed & says, "Let's do this." Here though we lose the time stamp on the narrative...Let's look at the whole; then at the parts: *But the people were displeased. "He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner," they grumbled. Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord & said, "I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, & if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!" Jesus responded, "Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek & save those who are lost."*

Now that appears to happen all in the same moment. Zac/Jesus turn from the tree toward Zac's house, people whinge, Zac declares a new lease on life (repents or something like that) & Jesus welcomes him into the kingdom. In our neat tidy theologies that sounds great. Jesus calls Zac. That prompts his pledge to change his ways, which Jesus then celebrates I bet I've preached that sermon especially around stewardship/budget time. We like nice tidy linear theology: experience or hear the gospel...trust the gospel...be baptized...be disciplined to live faithfully. Problem is...most of us don't live a straight-line life or faith. We follow Jesus in fits & starts & struggles & stumbles. We're Paul in Rom 7...we want to be faithful but there's an old sinner raging around in here like a mad bull some days. We want to obey & avoid the stuff that causes us mischief but like a dog returns to its vomit or a pig to the mud we jump in headfirst. If saving grace was waiting for me to get right...get my act together...act like I was serious 24/7...I'd be lost forever

2<sup>nd</sup> problem...that's not what the text says. Oh...I know that's what we "read," but let me show you something...it's in your printed material: *Zacchaeus quickly climbed down & took Jesus to his house in great excitement & joy. But the people were displeased. "He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner," they grumbled. Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord & said, "I (will) give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, & if I have cheated people on their taxes, I (will) give them back four times as much!" Jesus (responded) said to him, "Salvation has come to this home today, for this man (has shown himself to be) is also a true son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek & save those who are lost."* None of the words in parentheses are in the original Gk text...Most translators read it future-tense when it is all present-tense. Why does that matter? Read in the present tense I sense Zac is hoping to blunt the accusation about his unworthiness to have Jesus in his house & the parallel accusation against Jesus. He says, "Look Lord, I'm not really a bad guy. They may not let me in the synagogue or Temple, but I fulfill & exceed every religious obligation the Law requires."

Here's the kicker...unlike other places, Jesus *DOES NOT* commend Zac for his faith, his repentance, his obedience... Jesus' declaration about salvation & blessing Zac's place in the family of Abraham/people of God are ultimately not tied to anything Zac has said or done. His grand self-defense is irrelevant to Jesus. Why? Because the gospel is not about Zac...or John...or you...The good news is Jesus & only Jesus...He is the one sent to bring life to the dead to justify/declare righteous the ungodly. He is the one who gives himself as sacrifice. He is the one who defeats death by rising from the grave. He is the one who forgives sin by shedding his blood for us. He is the one overthrows evil by breaking the devil's hold over us through our fear of death & judgment & condemnation. Jesus is the one who sees us from before time began as God's beloved children & in dying & rising makes that a reality. He restores Zac to his place w/in the community & w/in the family of God & only Jesus does that for you & me. Gives Zac back his name. "pure" "clean" "innocent."

At some point...we are all the "outsider," small, insignificant, & of little importance...sure we don't measure up & have to prove ourselves...not just to others, but to ourselves...maybe even to God...when the job description for "you" was just not what you wanted...Jesus calls Zacchaeus & you & me out of our perceived obscurity & invisibility...Jesus sees. Jesus calls. Jesus knows who we are, & knows who we are meant to be. He already has written you into his story of life & love & joy through his death & resurrection. That is now your story...beloved child of the Father...inheritor of every heavenly blessing...victorious...over sin death & evil. *For the Son of Man came to seek & save those who are lost* Let's pray with that in mind: