

Letting the Blind See<sup>1</sup>  
Luke 18:31-19:10  
Isaiah 1:10-17

Westminster Presbyterian Church  
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### Luke 18:31-19:10

Then he took the twelve aside and said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be handed over to the Gentiles; and he will be mocked and insulted and spat upon. After they have flogged him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise again.” But they understood nothing about all these things; in fact, what he said was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.

As he approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard a crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.” Then he shouted, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Those who were in front sternly ordered him to be quiet; but he shouted even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” Jesus stood still and ordered the man to be brought to him; and when he came near, he asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” He said, “Lord, let me see again.” Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has saved you.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him, glorifying God; and all the people, when they saw it, praised God.

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.” Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”

### Isaiah 1:10-18

Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who asked this from your hand? Trample my courts no more; bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and calling of convocation— I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity. Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them. When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.

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<sup>1</sup> This sermon is inspired by one entitled “Zack’s Wife,” by Janet Norman of St. Andrew’s United Church, Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, Canada. It goes without saying that Ms. Norman is not responsible for what I have written.

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

Our Gospel reading this morning was familiar to most of us, I'm sure. I don't know about you, but I remember cloth figures on a flannelboard and a song about Zacchaeus being a "wee little man."

There is, though, more to this story than a short man wanting to see Jesus and climbing a tree. That probably happened pretty often in Jesus' ministry – no need to write it down. What is interesting and important about this story comes after Zacchaeus comes down from the tree.

I was looking around this week, and I came across an old manuscript. Let's see if it sheds some light on what happened here and why it's important to us, two thousand years later.

"My name is Zacchaeus. I'm a businessman from Jericho. I'm the richest man in Jericho, or I used to be. Not any more.

"I'm the tax collector for the Roman government in this district. I'm responsible to collect the tax levy they assess, and I'm accountable to the governor for the full amount, no matter how much I collect. You can imagine, I started assessing other people's taxes a little high, just to make sure that I had enough. I don't want to have to pay the district's taxes out of my own pocket, ...and, ... well, ... it got to be a habit. Tax bills started ever-so-gradually getting a little higher. Before I knew it, I was the richest man in town.

"Now, I don't know about where you live, but celebrities don't come through Jericho every day. So, when I heard that this preacher, Jesus of Nazareth, was coming, I went out to see him.

“Don’t you hate it when other people are there first to see the person you’ve come to see, and you can’t see anything? Me, too. So, I climbed a tree. Sure, it was undignified, which is not normally my style, but I really wanted to see this guy. I mean, they said he healed the sick and raised the dead! He even turned water into wine – good wine! The money I could make with an ability like that...

“But back to that day. Jesus was walking down the road with his followers, and he stopped and looked right at me! He told me, ‘Zacchaeus, come down. I must stay at your house today.’

“So, I hurried home and got things ready. Well, I told my wife, and she got all the servants scurrying around. The next thing you know, he’s here, at my house!

“Dinner was nice, if a little odd. Jesus was very intelligent, but humble, not anything like those typical Scripture-thumping preachers you see. You know the ones. I felt peaceful, comfortable, like I’d known him all my life.

“It was a little strange, having my wife sitting with me at a formal dinner, but Jesus asked her to join us. He kept asking her questions about the house and the gardens, and drawing her into the conversation. I found myself learning things I’d never known, from my own wife.

“The she started explaining my job, and how we came to be rich. I was making faces at her, willing her to stop talking, but she didn’t stop. Never admit you have extra money when you’re talking to a preacher!

“I tried to get her to stop without making a scene, but she didn’t stop. I blurted out that we were rich from tax surpluses – I wasn’t cheating all the people in town, technically. Those were reserves, in case of future tax shortages in the district. But ...yeah.

“It’s not personal, it’s just business, Jesus,’ I told him. “This is how government works.”

“Jesus didn’t say a word. He just looked at me.

“I work really hard, I deserve a little extra for my wife and my household.’

“Jesus didn’t say a word. He just looked at me.

“We’re employing people. Our servants have jobs because we have this money.’

“Jesus didn’t say a word. He just looked at me.

“The room was so quiet by this point, you could have heard a pin drop.

“It hit me how I was the richest man in town, but I had no peers. I had no one who understood my life. The only people who came to my parties were other rich men and their wives, people who wanted to suck up to me for my wealth and my power.

“It hit me that there were all these people in town who were descendants of Abraham like I was, but the only reason I knew their names was their tax assessments. I didn’t really know Blind Peter, or deadbeat Matthew, or Rachel, the perpetual tax debtor. I knew accounts on papyrus.

“It hit me that I had a beautiful person sitting next to me. Once I had thought she was wonderful, but I didn’t really know her any more. I spent all my time buried in scrolls or out socializing with other businessmen, and I didn’t really know my own wife.

“I had to do something about this. I told Jesus that I would give away half my wealth, and reimburse people I’d cheated, four times over.

“Jesus smiled that big smile of his, and said, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, ... For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.’

“After Jesus left, as you can imagine, I was a little upset with my wife. But I had no choice – I did what I had promised.

“I sold off all our statuary and nice vases and gorgeous carpets and fine furniture. I gave scrolls to the synagogue. I came home from that, and found my wife and the servants digging up her flower gardens to plant vegetables.

“I gave away money. I went through the records, and started giving out what were probably the world’s first ‘tax refunds,’ starting with the poorest people.

“Our rich friends dropped us, of course. Joseph explained, ‘You’re not the man you were, Zach.’ He did not seem to think that was a good thing, but I did. I felt ten years younger, and, for the look on my wife’s face when she looked at me, well, I would have done a lot.

“I started spending most evenings at home. That started out as not being invited to parties any more, but I found that I wanted to spend time with my wife. She asked me about my day, and really listened when I told her.

“When I asked her about her day, just trying to be polite, she actually told me, and I found myself listening. Not running through scrolls for tomorrow’s hearings, but really listening to her.

“After a while, she started proposing plans. She talked about schools and a library. She talked about particular people in the community who were sick or lonely, like Sarah who was crippled, Peter who was blind, Matthew who couldn’t keep a job because he had fits, and Rachel who had twin toddlers but no husband.

“She told me people ate the same food every meal and wore the same robe every day for months, because that was all they had. I had known all that, but having names made it more personal.

“I saw a side of my wife that I hadn’t seen before. She was kind and gentle in the household, of course, but she was that way out in the world, with all of those people, too. I had known she was beautiful, but I’d had no idea just how beautiful she was.

“One day she asked me to go with her to take some cold water to the people working those new vegetable gardens behind the house. What was I going to do? It was a simple request.

“When we got there, the people were so grateful, it nearly brought tears to my eyes. It was just water! They showed us the gardens and explained what they were growing where. Before I knew it, I had a hoe in my hand and they had me helping weed. When the sun went down and they went home and we went into the house, I felt more peaceful than I remembered ever feeling. More tired, too.

“When she asked me to come with her into town, I was ready, I thought. We walked down hand in hand. I met Sarah and Rachel and Matthew and Peter and more people than I can name. They all knew my wife and loved her, and she loved them. They were suspicious of me, but willing to give me a chance because of her.

“We go into town most days now. I’ve hired Matthew as a bookkeeper, and that’s working out better than I expected. My wife helps Rachel with her boys and visits with Miriam, who is so lonely since her husband died.

“We went up to Jerusalem yesterday, and I heard a familiar voice in the Temple. I climbed up the stairs to see over the crowd, and I saw Jesus. He smiled and nodded at me, and continued his story. I caught just his last point.

“Don’t be afraid, little flock, for your Father is delighted to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to people who have need. Make yourselves purses that don’t wear out, a treasure in heaven that never runs out, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.’<sup>2</sup>

Let those who have eyes, see.

AMEN.

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 12:32-34 (paraphrase).