

March 21, 2021

The Fifth Sunday of lent

Zacchaeus Sunday, Luke 19:1-10

Children's message: The story of Zacchaeus reminds us what God looks for in each of us. It was the thing that Zacchaeus had the most of. Much more than those around him who made fun of him. That thing Zacchaeus had was a good heart. God looks at the stuff on the inside. The things that are in our hearts. God knows if we are short or tall, skinny or large and the colour of our skin. He was the One that made us and trust me He knows. Yet we are responsible for what is in our hearts.

The experiences of life shape us and our outlook and approach to life. We cannot let the bad or tough experiences make us bitter and angry. We should try to learn from them and look for the silver lining in those situations. A loving and caring heart will help us to learn from those bad experiences and to not become bitter and angry. Zacchaeus could have been very bitter and angry with those who make fun of him, but he did not.

In Zacchaeus's situation he cheated people out of their money and people hated him for that. They made fun of his small size and talked about him behind his back. After he realized his mistake, he fixed it and paid the people he cheated back four times as much. He had a good and generous heart. Yet after fixing his mistakes people still talked

about him and made fun of him. This would make most people angry and bitter but not Zacchaeus.

God looks at our hearts and what is in them. We hope that God finds love, compassion and mercy when He looks there. Jesus found those things in Zacchaeus's heart and that was why He wanted to eat at his house. Yet the people still complained that Jesus was going there to eat.

Remember that what truly counts is what God finds in your heart. There will always be negative people trying to tear you down. Their hearts are negative and not what God looks for. The best way to deal with such people is to ignore them and continue living your life with as much love as you can muster in your heart.

Adult's message: Over the past weeks of Lent the readings have focused on repentance. Each story contained a different element of repentance and a unique depth of understanding. This week's reading is the pinnacle of what repentance should look like.

The story of Zacchaeus only appears in Luke's Gospel. The name Zacchaeus in Hebrew means pure and innocent one. Being the chief tax collector in Jericho has not helped Zacchaeus live up to his names meaning. Yet, Zacchaeus openly admits to this fact by his own admission. That requires a lot of self awareness and humility. It seems that Zacchaeus has done a lot of self reflection. He has done a lot of work on himself to set things correct. That requires a lot of humility considering his position in Jericho.

The true repentance that we see in Zacchaeus requires a lot of humility. Remember the six points of repentance from three weeks ago. One step was to correct the harm you have done. In order to do these steps properly you need to have your heart rooted in humility. David tells us in Psalm 25-9, "The humble He guides in justice, and the humble He teaches His ways." From the action he took it looks like Zacchaeus has learned something.

One of the steps for true repentance was to correct the damage or pain you have caused others. Zacchaeus has certainly done just that. He was required by Hebrew custom to repay only what he cheated people. However, Zacchaeus tells us that he has far exceeded the custom by repaying up to four times the amount in reparation. Even after repenting and making things correct with those he cheated, Zacchaeus is wanting something more. He is wanting a closer relationship with this fellow Jesus who many claim is the Son of God. James 4-10, "Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up."

Zacchaeus certainly did just that when he realized that Jesus was in Jericho. He desperately wanted to see Him. He would not let his stature prevent this. So he humbles himself and climbs a fig tree. It is a lifting up in a way. Zacchaeus's humility helped him to truly repent, to make things good with those he cheated and to draw closer to the Son of God. Some very good lessons for us to draw upon.

Due to his humility, Zacchaeus now has communion or community with Jesus. Our Lord is going to Zacchaeus's house for a meal. That is one of the closest and intimate bonds one can have in Hebrew culture. It still exists today in Semetic culture. 1 Peter 5: 5-6, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the

mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time. ``Zacchaeus become exalted in status because Jesus was to dine at his house. All of this was due to his humility and it enraged many. Yet keeping humble, Zacchaeus did not hold a grudge against those who murmured about this.

Zacchaeus teaches us so many things. Most importantly that true repentance can only come through humility. It will help you correct the wrongs that you have done. It may cost you status in your community as it did Zacchaeus. Yet in the end God will elevate you far beyond your expectations. There is room for God only in a humble heart. It is there that He works His greatest miracles. Humility is the key to repentance and this world in general. A humble heart draws us closer to God.

Take care and God Bless, the servant of God, Pastor D