

“When Jesus Invites Himself to Your Home”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Season of Pentecost, Sunday, November 10, 2013

James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Texts: Luke 19: 1-10

Jesus and Zacchaeus

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. ²A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. ⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way.

⁵When 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.”

⁶So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. ⁷All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.”

⁸Zacchaeus 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.”

⁹Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”

“Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today!”

Zacchaeus, too short to see over the crowd,

ran ahead of the parade of Jesus and disciples and followers and friends
in order to climb a tree for a better view.

He wanted to see Jesus of Nazareth.

He did not do it so that sometime in the distant future

the Hand Bell Choir at First Christian Church of Decatur
would play a musical piece named after him.

He did not run ahead and jump up and climb a tree

to make a name for himself,
or to open his heart or hearth, his home or wallet.

He was not looking to make change or change his ways or change his life.

Zacchaeus simply wanted to see Jesus.

What he did not know and could not fathom was that God wanted to see him, too.

The seeker was being sought.

The lost was already found.

The bully had it in him to become a benefactor.

The one set in his ways would change,
and make a world of difference.

Jesus said, "*Hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today!*"

Jesus Christ seeks us out and invites Himself into our homes.

Being a Christian is not a distance learning experience.

Our relationship with God is not predicated on watching from afar.

When it comes down to our relationship with God, there is no distance.

Being a follower of Jesus Christ is as personal

as the Son of God walking into your home,
into your life, into your choices and commitments,
your technology and time,
and making Himself completely at home.

Let's be authentic here; let's be honest with God and one another.

We tend to put up a sense of critical distance between our self and God.

Yes?

Maybe we feel safer that way,

or like less will be asked of us,

or our faith walk will be easier, simpler somehow.

We imagine that we can peer at God from up above or down below or sideways,

and not be seen ourselves,

like a family dog that hides his head under the bed in vain,

thinking we can't see his exposed legs and tail.

We tell ourselves that we are examining the Bible

when in fact the Word is examining us.

We like to say that we are seeking, looking, searching for the Holy,

when the Good News is that

God loves you and has already found you.

All that is left is our own realization and revelation.

We wrestle with how to apply Sunday morning worship into the everyday,

when it is Jesus Christ Himself

who insists that we invite him into our homes and lives,

into our businesses and personal business.

Jesus Christ looks at you and me and says,

"Hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today!"

Jesus first said this to Zacchaeus, and look what happened to him.

We deduce from the story that one of Zacchaeus' gifts was persistence.

We also know that he was so short he could not see Jesus
because of the crowd between him and Christ.

(Have people ever gotten between you and seeing God in your life?)

My family and I visited a 14th century castle
that had a remarkable display of armor.

I wondered whether the full body armor was for a child because it was so small.
However the tour guide informed us that this set was worn by full grown adults.
Clearly some of our ancestors were short of stature.

Imagine, my friends, that Zacchaeus was even shorter.

Yet he did not let his stature or other people get in the way of seeing Jesus.

He did not let anything hinder him;

he would not be denied.

We all have hindrances, challenges, disabilities, obstacles, fears,
insecurities, doubts.

Are you looking around to see who is blocked out,
who cannot see and might need a boost?

An encouraging word? A helping hand?

What can we learn from Zacchaeus?

He ran ahead of the crowd and climbed a tree.

Yes, at last he could see Jesus!

And Jesus could see him.

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.”

There is a blessed urgency in God’s invitation.

Hurry! Now is the time!

In effect, Jesus looks at Zacchaeus and says,

“We belong together, you and I. You belong to me, and I belong to you.

I see you, and I want to have a relationship with you...now!”

Consider for a moment whose house it is that Jesus insists he enter.

Zacchaeus was what we call nowadays a seeker.

He had looked for happiness in wealth,

and he made a lot of money as a tax collector.

Jericho was a major town.

He was skimming off the top and bottom,

making money and losing friends.

He sought for meaning in money,

only to find instead that he was despised and hated by his neighbors.

What good is an abundance of things if you have no relationships?

Paul said, *“You can gain the whole world*

but if you have not love, you are a clanging gong...”

We do get lost in the most spectacular and most simple ways.

A few months back I was at the University of Georgia campus

to experience the Mary France Early Lecture Series,

given in honor of our own Elder and Trustee

who was the first African American graduate from UGA.

I dropped off a carload of church members at the chapel and headed off to park.

However, while walking back from the parking deck

I got completely and utterly turned around.

I stopped a gentleman and told him I was lost,

and would he please point me toward the church.

He reached into his pocket and handed me a Gideon's Bible.

True story.

Thanks be to God, the Word has the power to seek and save the lost,

to transform and change the whole people of God.

God is still speaking today.

Listen and let God's word into your heart and hearth, your hope and home.

Jesus Christ looks expectantly at us and says to saints and sinners alike:

"Hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today!"

Throughout the Gospel of Luke Jesus Christ lifts up the plight of sinners

and advocates for the inclusion of tax collectors, including Zacchaeus.

For example, in the 3rd and 7th Chapters,

tax collectors are baptized by John (3:12, 7:29).

In the 5th Chapter they are made disciples (5:27-29),

and in three chapters they are welcomed and included

at the Lord's table (15:1, 5:30, 7:34).

Luke 15 reads:

*"Now all the **tax collectors** and sinners were coming near to listen to him.*

2 And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying,

"This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." (Luke 15:1)

In the 18th Chapter of Luke,

Jesus tells a parable in which a tax collector is compared to a Pharisee,
and the humbler of the two is lifted up
as an example of authentic spirituality. (18: 9-14)

Clearly the Good Book has a point to make:

there is wideness in God's mercy, and all shall be made welcome.

"Hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today!"

The welcome presence of Jesus in Zacchaeus' home

will change the tax collector from a thief to a philanthropist,
from a bully to a benefactor.

How do you think the mercy of God will affect you when Jesus enters your home?

What would you like for God's grace to offer and provide?

Let the light of God shine in the shadows and enlighten your heart and hearth.

6"So Zacchaeus hurried down and was happy to welcome Jesus."

7All who saw what Zacchaeus did began to grumble and said,

"He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner."

Oh, we can be such a competitive people sometimes!

And mean spirited!

Judgmental and hard-hearted!

They say that the church is the only army that shoots its wounded.

Let's do less shooting and more nurturing.

And are we not all wounded?

Are we not all in need of the healing Christ offers and provides?

The wideness of God's mercy knows no bounds, no walls, no limits, no end.

We point to the grace of God when we extend mercy unconditionally,

freely and graciously, without strings attached.

8 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.”*

I read the Holy Bible as a living testament of people’s faith experiences.

Stories of human transformation touch us to the quick.

Zacchaeus took the steps he could to grow and change.

You know, God doesn’t ask anyone to be great.

God is already great.

God asks only for us to be faithful, be merciful, do justice,
to transform and be transformed.

Zacchaeus backed up his talk with his walk.

He promised to give half his possessions to the poor,
and to reimburse quadruple anyone he had defrauded.

When Jesus invites himself
into our homes and hearts, our lives and loves,
He also checks out our faithful stewardship.

Dedicate the first 10% of your work week to God and God’s church.

Pledge today that you will give the first hours of your work week to God.

Pledge whatever you earn in those first hours of work to Christ and His Church.

Pledge whatever you do and say in those first hours to God.

What is amazing is how effectively
such a dedication of time and resources

then touches and impacts everything else you do.
Whenever we start our work week focused on God,
then the holiness of our first actions
touches the rest of the week,
the rest of our relationships, the rest of our life.

*9 Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house,
because he too is a son of Abraham.
10 For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."*

"Today salvation has come to this house!"
The one who was excluded is, in fact, a child of God!
The one who is transformed is celebrated!
Jesus' acclamation after the promise of a good deed
speaks volumes about the joy He feels when a soul repents.
To repent is to turn away from sin and toward God.
To repent is to turn away from anything that separates us
from God or one another or our selves,
and to turn toward the ways of God.

"[What Jesus demands is] not a mere change of words but a change of life." [\[i\]](#)

One day a Sunday School teacher
welcomed a new student into her elementary age class.
She saw immediately that Suzy, the little girl, had one hand.
So throughout the hour the teacher hovered near Suzy
to ensure that no one teased her.
Finally she relaxed when none of the other boys and girls made mention of it.

As class drew to a close she asked everyone to get into a circle.

Without a second thought she said, “*Now put your hands together and say,*

‘Here is the church, here is the steeple, open the doors, and let out the...’”

Suddenly she realized what she had done.

Quick as a wink Johnny, the boy next to Suzy, turned to her and said,

“Here, Suzy, take my hand. We can build the church together.”

Hurry, Christ, enter into our hearts and hearths

so we can build Your Church together!

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

[i] William Barclay, The Gospel of Luke, Westminster Press, 235.