

***“Making Change”***

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia  
Season of Pentecost, Sunday, October 30, 2016  
James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Texts: Luke 19: 1-10

*Jesus and Zacchaeus*

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

<sup>5</sup>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.”

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

<sup>8</sup>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.”

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

Sermon

***Making Change***

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he was a chief tax collector and was rich.*

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but on account of the crowd he could not,  
because he was short in stature.*

*<sup>4</sup>So Zacchaeus ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus,  
because he was going to pass that way.*

This story is as rich as Zacchaeus.

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 didn't care how silly he looked; he wanted to see Jesus of Nazareth.

He was a seeker,

seeking for a better vantage point to see Jesus  
and maybe even to follow Jesus,

to follow in his footsteps,

to learn how to be a follower of God.

Seekers seek, and that is what Zacchaeus was doing.

As far as we know he did not call out the name of God

above the noise of the crowd

so that sometime in the distant future

our Hand Bell Choir at First Christian Church of Decatur

would play a musical piece named after him.

As far as we know 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.

As far as we know 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 at that moment

and could not yet fathom

was that Jesus wanted to see him, too.

To Jesus, you see, the seeker was being sought.

To Jesus, the lost was already found.

To Jesus, the bully, the head honcho tax collecting bully,

had it in him to become a benefactor,

a “righter” of wrongs,  
a philanthropist of social causes,  
a financial adjuster of social injustice.

Lord knows, the Lord knew that the one set in his ways  
had it in him to make a change,  
and that spiritual life adjustment  
would make a world of difference.

### ***Making Change***

*“So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him,  
because [Jesus] was going to pass that way.”*

One summer my family visited a 14<sup>th</sup> century castle in Germany  
that had a remarkable display of armor.  
The full body armor was so small  
I wondered whether it was made for a child.

When asked, the tour guide said,  
*“That set of armor 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, wounds,  
insecurities, doubts, scars.  
We all need someone to look out for us, to look around for us, to look up at us,  
to call out our name and offer an encouraging word.  
Can you do that for someone in your midst?  
Would you?  
Looking around to see who is blocked out, who is missing,  
who cannot see and might need a boost,  
or an encouraging word, or a helping hand.

### ***Making Change***

*“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.”*

Jesus Christ seeks us out and invites Himself into our homes.  
Learning how to be a Christian, a follower of God,  
is not a long distance learning experience.  
Our relationship with the Holy is not predicated on watching from afar.  
When it comes down to our relationship with God,  
there is no distance, no gap, no void, no detachment or disassociation.  
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,  
into your wallet or purse, your purchases or priorities,  
and setting up shop and making Himself completely at home.

Some of us may wrestle with how to apply Sunday morning worship  
into the everyday, into the other six days a week.

In fact it is Jesus Christ Himself who insists  
that we make our relationship with the divine so personal  
that we invite Jesus into our homes and lives,  
into our businesses personally & into our personal business.

The Savior of the world isn't just passing by in a Sunday morning parade.  
The Savior of our life is inviting Himself into our hearts and homes.

### ***Making Change***

*“Hurry and come down!” says Jesus, looking at you and me,  
“for I must stay at your house today!”*

Let's be authentic; let's be honest with God and one another.  
We tend to establish some critical distance between our self and God.

*Yes? Maybe sometimes...?*  
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 a tree branch up above  
or from the side of the parade . . . and not be seen ourselves.

This kind of spiritual denial reminds me of my family dog Bryan,  
an 85 pound Black Lab that hides himself under the bed,  
yet all 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,  
seeing us as we are and loving us all the more.  
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 God's revelation.  
All that is left is our own salvation and God's redemption.  
All that is left is our own change and God's forgiving, transforming grace.  
All that is left is...

### ***Making Change***

*So [Zacchaeus] hurried down and was happy to welcome [Jesus].  
All who saw it began to grumble and said,  
"He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner."*

Oh, we – meaning we the Church of Jesus Christ –  
can be such a competitive people sometimes!  
And mean spirited! Judgmental! Hard-hearted!  
They say that the church is the only army that shoots its wounded.  
This week our church marquee reads:

IF YOU HAVE BEEN  
ABUSED OR MISUSED  
BY THE CHURCH  
WE ARE SORRY

This is the third time in 18 years we have posted the same language,  
the same compassion, the same public expression of understanding,  
and each time we do  
we receive from across our fair city  
notes and calls of gratitude  
from members, friends, and neighbors alike.  
Let's change our choice of weapons when it comes to  
communal interaction.  
Let's do less grumbling and moaning; let's be more  
grateful and merciful.  
Let's do less violence against one another's feelings  
and bodies and psyches;

let's become more nurturing.  
When we do so, we not only help each other, we help our self.  
And are we not all wounded?  
Do we not all have scars,  
scars that are physical or mental, spiritual or psychological?  
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 people to the grace of God  
each time we extend mercy unconditionally,  
freely and graciously, without strings attached.  
We point out that here in Christ's church on the corner of Ponce & Nelson Ferry  
is where gather the lost, the last and the least, the saints and sinners.  
Here all are called out of their shadow places and masked faces,  
our tree branches and fears;  
here all are affirmed & loved & invited into God's company of grace.  
Here we lose our sense of lost-ness, and, thanks be to God, find that we belong.

Three years ago a representative group from this significant congregation  
traveled east to the University of Georgia campus in Athens.  
We were there to experience the Mary Frances Early Lecture Series,  
given in honor of the first African American graduate from UGA.  
Mary Frances Early is a former Deacon, Elder and current Church Trustee.  
That lovely April Tuesday I was the designated driver,  
so I dropped off at the chapel a carload of church members,  
all ready for the lecture and reception,

and headed off to find a parking space.

However, while walking back from the parking deck on the UGA campus

I got completely and utterly turned around.

I saw a gentleman in a blazer.

*"Excuse me, sir," I said. "I am so lost.*

*Would you please point me toward the church?"*

Without saying a word he reached into his blazer jacket pocket,

pulled out a Gideon's Bible, and handed it to me.

True story.

May God's Word direct the Church be host and home for the lost, like Zacchaeus, like me, like you.

### **Making Change**

*\*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."*

The Holy Bible is a theological document.

The Holy Bible as a living testament of people's faith experiences.

The Holy Bible is replete with story after story of human transformation,

stories that touch us to the quick.

They touch us because we can see our self in the failures and feats

of our spiritual ancestors,

our spiritual predecessors who stumbled and bumbled

and clawed and crawled their way in and out of life's deepest challenges,

and then, with the help of God, survived and thrived to tell their story.

All across the Holy Bible we overhear about followers of God

with checkered pasts who went on to faithfully serve the Lord.

Consider this litany of folks and fools, friends and foes

that Christ called and empowered

to lay aside their pasts and move with God into faithful futures:

Adam passed the buck Noah was a drunk

Gideon, Jeremiah and Timothy were all too young Sarah was too old

Abraham was even older

Isaac was a daydreamer Jacob was a cheater

Joseph was abused, misused, and used Moses was a stutterer

Samson was a womanizer Rahab was a prostitute

David was an adulterer and a murderer

Jonah ran from God, twice Peter denied Christ, thrice

Matthew was a tax collector

Martha was a worrier

Zacchaeus was too small Nicodemus was too literal

11 disciples slept when Jesus needed them the most Paul persecuted Christians...for a living

and Lazarus, well, Lazarus was dead!

Ever notice in the Holy Bible how God doesn't ask anyone to be great,

and doesn't have to, 'cause God is already great.

God's love is all the greatness the world will ever need.

God invited, calls, compels, asks only for us to be faithful,

"to be merciful, to do justice, to walk humbly with our God."

Zacchaeus could have wilted before the grumbling crowd,

or before Jesus,

or even before himself,

yet he stood tall.

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.

These are changes we can do as well.

Stand tall with your 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.

Start your work week focused on God,

then watch in wonder as the holiness of your first actions

touch the rest of the work week,

the rest of your relationships, the rest of your life.

### ***Making Change***

<sup>9</sup>Then Jesus said to [Zacchaeus and the crowd],  
    *“Today salvation has come to this house,  
    because he too is a son of Abraham.  
    <sup>10</sup>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]

    Consider whose house it was exactly  
that Jesus insisted he enter,  
    and not only enter but bless,  
    and not only bless but pronounce “Salvation has come here!”

Throughout the Gospel of Luke Jesus Christ lifted up the plight of sinners  
and advocated for the inclusion of tax collectors, including Zacchaeus.

For example, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Chapters of Luke,  
tax collectors are baptized by John (3:12, 7:29).  
In the 5<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Luke they are made disciples (5:27-29),  
and in three more 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.  
    <sup>2</sup>And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying,  
    “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.” (Luke 15:1)*

Consider that in the 18<sup>th</sup> 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 Holy Bible has some valid points to make for the human context:  
there is wideness in God’s mercy,  
    all shall be made welcome,  
    and what are you and I going to do about it, together?

### ***Making Change***

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.