# Be Seen and See!

Sermon preached by Rev. Chuck Cole 11/03/19 at St. John’s UMC Staunton

# Luke 19:1-10 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

### Jesus and Zacchaeus

19 He entered Jericho and was passing through it. 2 A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. 3 He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. 5 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.” 6 So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. 7 All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.” 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.” 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 we are giving God thanks and praise for the saints, for all those, known and unknown, who have gone on to glory before us in the faith. We are giving thanks for those with whom we will march into the New Jerusalem giving praise to God for his salvation.

Today we are blessed by the lectionary with the story of one such Saint Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus, was a wealthy tax collector. Tax collectors rarely win popularity contests but Jewish tax collectors in Roman occupied Palestine were especially unpopular. Zacchaeus was despised by everyone else.

But one day this despised wealthy tax collector hears that Jesus is coming to town and he wants to see him. However, because of his short stature, he needs to be in the front but no one will let him. So he runs ahead on the route and climbs a Sycamore Tree so he can see Jesus. When Jesus gets to the tree he looks up and does something incredible.

I want to pause here for a moment he looked up and saw Zacchaeus in the tree. In the OT God was referred to first by Hagar and by others as El Roi Not ELROY E-L-R-O-Y but EL Roi E-L R-O-I which means the God who sees me and who loves me and is the bringer of salvation. Jesus is of course El Roi incarnate and his eyes have fallen with grace on Zacchaeus and

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

Why Jesus exactly choose Zacchaeus is unknown to us - maybe he sees an openness in him a response to God’s prevenient grace that caused him to desire to see Jesus so much he did the most indecorous thing possible of climbing a tree. Children climbed trees no grown men. Maybe seeing him in that tree made Jesus smile and he saw a vibrancy and life in Zacchaeus. Maybe the Father through the spirit pointed him out. We do not know for sure or maybe it was all of them but he sees him and calls out to him.

Whatever the reason it was a profound honor to be selected by a traveling prophet or preacher as the house in which he would receive hospitality. It is an act of immense love and grace on the part of Jesus to invite himself to Zacchaeus house.

After Zacchaeus having been seen and invited responds by hurrying down out of the tree and was thrilled to welcome Jesus to his home.

In Jesus choice of Zacchaeus and Zacchaeus’ response we have a good reminder to not discount the working of prevenient grace in the heart of others.

We might want to ask someone to church or an event, or feel a prompting to pray with someone, or want to right a word of witness in a card or speak a word and are sometimes tempted to say that person won’t be interested and so don’t, or we think that person will not respond in the way I want and so we do not bother. They may say no, they may dismiss what you have to say and God can still work with it but they may say yes, or that word might be just what they wanted or needed to hear. The simple act of knowing they have been seen by you might make them understand they have been seen by El Roi. We do not know the work prevenient grace of God has done. So let us be generous with Jesus like he was generous with Zacchaeus and has been with us. When we feel a call to share him in some way but then are tempted to back off because of discouragement think of Zacchaeus.

Having been seen and called out to and invited Zacchaeus welcomes Jesus into his home as it is. Zacchaeus welcomes Jesus to the center of his life which might be appealing to the eye but is poor in heart.

I so wish we knew exactly what Jesus said to him but apparently that was for Zacchaeus ears alone. I am confident the call he received was to repent and turn to the Kingdom of God serving his purpose in the world. Zacchaeus opened himself and responds with Joy.

He shows his response to the New Kingdom to the way of Jesus love for God and neighbor by giving away half of his money to the poor. He also repents of his sin by going beyond - OT legal requirements which simply require full repayment he pledges four times back.

Having been seen, called to and invited Salvation came to Zacchaeus house and that is why Jesus came. Jesus rejoices.

In our passage we see a saint is simply one who recognizes they are seen, hears the call, opens themselves fully and responds to Christ repenting and joining the Kingdom serving his purpose in the world.

That is essentially what a life of discipleship is living each day in the service and presence of God.

Over a lifetime discipleship is a complex process. It is not always smooth sailing. But as we seek him knowing he has seen and called us and is working in us we will move and be shaped.

Zacchaeus is a reminder that no one is beyond the grace of God in Christ. Not even you whoever you may be.

God Loves You and There is Nothing You Can do About It - Jerry Kalaas

Jesus is reaching out to any and all and even the seemingly most unlikely might respond, repent and come to the Kingdom and grow in incredible ways.

As we come up for communion in a few minutes let us remember and rejoice in the great grace of God. Let us rejoice in the fact that we have been seen and been blessed with the ability to see. As we receive let us ask that we would be filled with Christ in such a way that we are empowered by him to share his love and Grace with all. Perhaps especially those whom we would believe the least likely to receive or respond. If you feel a prompting invite someone to church or a Bible Study or an event you never know what God has done in their heart. They may say yes or no, they may receive what you have to say or reject it. In either event a seed has been planted out of which God can bear fruit.

After we receive Holy Communion at the rail or in your pew invite Jesus into the center of your life - the messiest parts - he is El Roi and he sees and just like he offered Zacchaeus grace in the center of where he was he will do the same for you. Offer to him places in your heart that you might be tempted to hold back in your service to him and ask for the wisdom and strength needed to be faithful in those places.

Also give thanks to God for the ways he has poured grace into your life through saints who have gone on to glory and those who have not. Give EL Roi praise for seeing them and molding and shaping them and using them to bless you and the host of others that they may have touched.

Let us strive to see and respond like Zacchaeus did in our story each day. Let us with the power of the Holy Spirit see those like Zacchaeus around us. Amen.