

Reflection for November 2, 2025 - A Curious Story

Inspired by Luke 19:1-10

Luke's story of Zacchaeus is familiar to us. All the same I find it a bit odd. I'm wondering why someone of his station would be so interested in seeing Jesus.

He really really wants to encounter Jesus, so much that he runs ahead of the crowd and climbs up sycamore tree to be sure he can see Jesus clearly. Zacchaeus would have done anything to have an unrestricted view. He behaves like a child on the streets of a Santa Claus parade, leaving mom and dad back on the sidewalk and weaving through the throng of onlookers to the curb. The child needs to see Santa clearly!

I am very curious about this account because Zacchaeus is not scrambling to be near Jesus to ask for the healing Jesus publicly offers. He is not a blind man seeking to have his sight restored. He is not the lame beggar hoping that he might be able to walk again. He is not the haemorrhaging woman, desperately reaching out to touch Jesus' robe. What does he want?

Perhaps he is seeking healing, but not for his physical well-being. The wealthy tax collector Zacchaeus it seems has been harbouring some guilt. And his confession comes out after Jesus asks him to come down from the tree. **"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."** Zacchaeus is looking for forgiveness, but was that his initial intention?

I would love to have an interview with Zacchaeus because I would be very interested in asking him why he really came that day. Did he expect Jesus to see him and summon him to come down from the tree and meet him. Was he just curious like you and I would be if the King of England was driving by in his coach?

Consider, if you were Zacchaeus. You climb down from your perch, you are next to Jesus, in front of the crowd, and expected to speak. What would you say? If it was me I bet I would ask for forgiveness too, for all I had done in my life and career. I am after all in front of the Prince of Peace. I'm not about to ask him about the meaning of life. I would be overcome with emotion and in the language of the time I would likely blurt out, "Forgive me Jesus for I am a sinner."

And so I am interested in this gospel story and curious if Zacchaeus came to see Jesus for some other reason. Jesus may never have noticed him up the Sycamore. And if he didn't so what? There may not have been an encounter at all. What happens to our tax collector then?

I'm not sure which interview it was, it may have been my last. In all there are three before a candidate is considered ready for commissioning or ordination. In any case, during one of my interview sessions a panel member asked me, "Ian, what is it that most excites you about being in ministry? What are you hoping to achieve?"

I could be naïve I replied, but I believe there are many many souls out there that are hungry for the spirit's presence. They are the folks we might call spiritual by not religious. So many have turned away from organized religion because of doctrinal policies, churches that want to control their parishioners, Clergy that are inflexible in how we are supposed to "see" God or how we are to interpret scripture. In that sense the church has a bad name and people are staying away. My hope is that through my ministry, I could help to encourage the spiritually hungry to have another look at church and who God might be for them.

That has been my hope in the years that I have been with you. And nothing has enriched my soul more than knowing how that has happened and how it continues to happen. You know that God is not obscured in clouds and accessible only to those that pray the right way. You see God in the "every day" activities. You experience God wondering, and questioning, in loneliness and in grief. Despite

chaos around us, you remain hopeful that the spirit of gentleness and compassion can break through. And you know God does not just exist here every Sunday morning.

I expect all of you have different understandings and different experiences of the God I call Holy Love. I think I'm correct, I sure hope I am, that you are comfortable being who you are here. This ministry is built on mutual respect, appreciation for all in our diversity, and unconditional love. And when necessary, we practice forgiveness when our perfect intentions stray from what Jesus would expect of us.

Perhaps Zacchaeus was a seeker, a modern day Spiritual but not Religious person. He was wealthy and didn't need anything of material value. But something was missing from his life. I think his soul was aching for something he really couldn't put his hands on, something he really couldn't understand.

Perhaps that vacancy was a real connection with God. Perhaps he climbed up in that Sycamore tree not to see Jesus, but God incarnate. Perhaps he climbed up in those branches and wondered, "God, where are you? People say you are here in this man Jesus. I'm seeking you, I want to know you, show me a sign." And perhaps he received his answer upon Jesus' invitation. **"Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today."**

What might we suppose transpired at Zacchaeus' home that evening? We don't know anything about that from our gospel reading. Do you think Jesus admonished Zacchaeus for his past indiscretions? Do you think Jesus tried to strike fear into him reminding him that his soul might end up in Sheol, the Hebrew name for the underworld of the realm of dead, similar to our modern-day Hell? I don't see the conversation going that way.

I see Zacchaeus and Jesus sitting by an open fire. Jesus asks, "what questions do you have of me?" Zacchaeus answers, "teacher how do I begin I know God?" "I'm a wealthy man and I want for nothing. But I feel guilty about my life of pursuing riches and possessions. There is something missing. I feel incomplete."

"Yes," Jesus says, "you have, like many, been preoccupied." "Your soul is thirsty for spiritual nourishment. You are incomplete because you know there is something greater than wealth and possessions and you ache to find it.

Follow my way and you will find what you are looking for. The God that has sent me is here among us now. God declares the unquenchable light of love among all people. God's breath replenishes our doubts with hope. God's heart beats a constant rhythm of joy through us. God's arms hold securely all who require empathy and assurance. The Creator is a Holy presence for all who reach out fully embodied in our compassionate way of being."

Well of course I have no evidence whatsoever of what might have been Jesus' conversation with Zacchaeus. And my assumptions are completely based on my inquisitiveness and wondering.

Having said that I do know that many folks are seeking some kind of connection these days with what they might call the Holy Spirit, Spiritual Nurturing, connections with a Creator or any number of other expressions of a divine presence. There is a huge need for soul connection that can make one feel a belonging, instill hope and provide some assurance. There are many seekers outside the sanctuary walls of countless churches.

Jesus, I think recognized that need in Zacchaeus and told him to come down from the tree and talk. I'm thinking we could do the same thing, and I'm praying it happens.

Be watchful for those you encounter in your daily walk, those who may be up in the trees wondering. Ask them to come down and talk. You have a story to tell. Perhaps they might be curious to hear it.

Thanks for listening this morning. Amen