**Messy Church – 18th November 2023**

**Zacchaeus and tax collecting**

The way Jesus’ teaching changed people’s attitudes to others.

The activities are:

1. **Painted money bags:** Luke chapter 19, verses 1 to 12
2. **Miniature trees:** Luke chapter 19, verses 1 to 12
3. **Zacchaeus pop-up:** Luke chapter 19, verses 1 to 12 (in the Celebration)
4. **Cheese pull-aparts:** Luke chapter 19, verses 1 to 12
5. **Tax collector’s booth:** Matthew chapter 9, verses 9 to 13
6. **Heart shaped biscuits:** a sign of love – shown by Jesus in both stories, and by those he changed – both Matthew and Zacchaeus
7. **Pictures of what you like for tea:** We’ll draw pictures during the celebration, but you could also use Playdoh to make models

**Stories and Activities**

Zacchaeus was a tax collector who lived in Jericho. Because he was a tax collector, and rich, he was not liked by his fellow citizens. When he heard that Jesus was passing through the town, he decided that he wanted to see him, but because he was short, and everyone else wanted to see Jesus as well, he climbed a tree, so he could see over the heads of the crowd.

When Jesus got to the tree where Zacchaeus was, he stopped and looked up. He told Zacchaeus that he wanted to eat at his house that evening. People in the crowd complained that Jesus would eat with a man like Zacchaeus, who was a “sinner” – meaning that he was worse than the usual, rich and not nice. Zacchaeus stood in front of Jesus and said that he would give half his money to the poor, and repay 4 times as much money as he had taken from people, if he had cheated them.

Jesus commended him, and reminded the crowd that Zacchaeus was also a Jew, like themselves.

**1. Painted money bags:** Luke chapter 19, verses 1 to 12

Anyone collecting money needs something to put the money in. We are going to paint our bags, so that we know they are ours.

**You will need:** a piece of thin cotton or polycotton fabric, about 6 inches by 12 inches to make a purse about 5 inches square – or an organza pouch, which can be bought from various craft suppliers, sewing thread and needle (or access to a sewing machine!), scissors, and ribbon or thread for a tie, fabric paint, or fabric ink, or diluted ready mix paint. The paint or ink is likely to soak through the layers of the purse, so you may want to cover your worktop with plastic.

Make the purse up with a channel round the top (there is a worksheet in the pack), and with the thread or ribbon threaded through the channel.

With the purse laid flat on your working surface, over a plastic cover, drip your ink or paint colours onto the purse – you can make a pattern or have random splodges. Remember that the paint or ink will spread through the fibres, so don’t put the drips too close together.

Leave to dry.

**2 Miniature trees: –** Luke chapter 19, verses 1 to 12

**You will need:** a base (we will use mdf blocks with a hole in the middle, but layers of corrugated cardboard stuck together, with a small hole through would work), a longish twig with branches, strong enough to stand up in the hole, crepe or tissue paper to make leaves – shades of green, yellow, scissors, glue if needed

Wedge a twig into the hole in your base, so that it stands up. Cut or tear leaf shapes from your tissue or crepe paper, and either stick them to the branches of the twig, or make a small hole in each leaf, and put it on a branch of the twig, so that it looks like a leafy tree.

**Talk about:** not being popular with the people around you; or being smaller and not able to see when there are a lot of people around. Imagine how other people feel if they have these problems.

**3 Zacchaeus pop up:** Luke chapter 19, verses 1 to 12

Taxes are government income from the members of the governed society – all working people in Britain pay taxes, as long as their income is over a certain level. The government uses this money to pay teachers to teach, and to pay councils to have schools built and maintained. They use the money to help pay for road and rail improvements, the army, navy and airforce to be paid, as well as the civil service, the people who make sure the work of government is done properly.

Taxes are also paid under other headings – car tax is not used for repairing roads, it just goes into the government’s income. National Insurance is a tax – it is used for making sure the National Health Service, and the State Pension, are funded. Value Added Tax is paid on some food and clothing items – and again, it goes into the government’s general funds. There are also taxes on companies, inheritance (what you pay to the government when someone leaves you money) and other things. There are also such things as toll roads and bridges – you pay the money to use them, and the money is used to maintain them.

Tax collectors in Britain are paid by the government – they are part of the civil service. They do not decide how much tax will be paid, they just make sure that the rules the government sets are kept. Tax collectors in this country can be male or female, and they are paid at the same rate as everyone else doing the same job. Tax collectors are not popular – they take money that people would rather keep for themselves – but they are also tax payers themselves – they pay income tax, value added tax, customs duty, too.

The Roman Empire in the time of Jesus also charged taxes. There were taxes on income (usually about 1%), on produce – which could be paid by handing over part of the produce (wheat, olives, fish, sheep), tolls for bridges or roads, and other things. Most of the money would be sent to the local governor, who would send the appropriate sum to Rome, and some of the money would be spent in the province.

The biggest difference between Roman tax collecting and British tax collecting is the nature of the tax collector. The Emperor would have people to work out how much each province could pay. The Roman governors in the provinces (such as Judea) worked out how much a given community should be able to pay in taxes (a village like Emmaus, just outside Jerusalem, would not be expected to raise as much as Jerusalem itself), and then he would ask for volunteers from the area to raise that amount or more. The man (and he was always a man) who said he could raise the most was likely to get the job. So a Roman tax collector was not a government employee. The men who offered to be tax collectors were not paid – not by anyone. They charged the people they taxed more than was necessary to pay the governor, to pay for them to live. It was quite possible for people to get rich on the money they overcharged the taxpayer – and it was certainly believed that all tax collectors did!

**You will need:** the images and instructions with this pack, card in green and brown, or card painted these colours, or just the brown, and some white – make the top of the tree shape, and stick scrunched up green crepe or tissue paper on, card to make Zacchaeus, a straw or lolly stick, scissors, colouring pencils or felt tip pens (and/or paint), glue and sticky tape.

Construct the model according to the instructions, and use it to tell the story.

**Talk about:** the life of a tax collector in the Roman Empire and compare it with tax collecting today. No-one likes tax collectors now – why not?

**4. Cheese pull aparts:** Luke chapter 19, verses 1 to 12

In first century Judea, meals were very public things – all sorts of people might turn up, as well as the people who had been invited. And everyone would be fed, although those who just came might not get the fanciest food. So this recipe is something that could easily be shared – if there were more people, the pieces would be smaller!

**You will need:** the recipe in the pack – including the ingredients and the tools

**Talk about:** sharing food with people – can you imagine having just anyone to turn up for tea? How would you be sure you had enough food?

**5. Tax collector’s booth:** Matthew chapter 9, verses 9 to 13

This story is about one of Jesus’ disciples. The gospel of Matthew calls him Matthew, but in Mark (chapter 2, verses 13 to 17, the story is exactly the same, except that the tax collector is called Levi. If you check all the references to Matthew/Levi they agree that his father was called Alphaeus, whatever he was called. This tax collector worked in a specific location, in a fixed “booth”. This probably means that he was collecting a specific tax – Mark says that Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, so perhaps he was collecting tax from the fishermen. They would sell their catch, and then pay the tax man, according to how much they had earned.

**You will need:** a piece of card, the scanned image of the booth, and the photo of a finished one – you don’t have to print them if you can see them on a computer or tablet – scissors, pencil, ruler, colouring pencils or felt tip pens if wanted.

Draw the pieces of the booth on the card, cut them out and stick them together – remember to cut enough extra on the pieces to stick them to each other.

**Talk about:** what it would be like to be in one place all day, and make sure that people came and paid their taxes. You might have to call to people – or even chase after them if they didn’t come to you. Would it be better to wait, or to walk around and see who was selling fish, and therefore who should be paying?

**6. Heart-shaped biscuits**

When Jesus involved himself in people’s lives, they changed. Matthew and Zacchaeus changed – Matthew stopped being a tax collector, and became one of Jesus’ close friends; Zacchaeus became a different person, not quite the tax collectors he had been – he was no longer going to overcharge people, and he was going to help those less well off than he was. We are going to make heart shaped biscuits, to remind us of the change of heart that Jesus can achieve in other people.

**You will need:** the recipe attached – ingredients and tools. We will make the biscuit mix in advance, as we don’t have time to make two recipes from scratch, and just work from the rolling out at Messy Church.

**Talk about:** changing the way we think about life and our lives in particular. Think of ways of remembering why we have changed, and how we can keep the change.

**Celebration**

We’ll sing “Lord I lift your name on high” <https://youtu.be/c12Ta6_WJrw>

There was going to be a big crowd. Zacchaeus knew it. Whenever Jesus was around there were big crowds. And Zacchaeus was quite small, he wouldn’t be able to see over people’s heads. And he didn’t want to be seen by the crowd in any case. They all hated him. They were, he thought, right to hate him.

Zacchaeus wasn’t a very nice man. He was a tax collector. No-one likes paying taxes but it wasn’t just that, he collected taxes for the Romans, the enemy. And he collected more than he should and made himself rich on the strength of it.

But he so wanted to see Jesus. He looked at the street which Jesus would go down. There were trees growing along the street. “What if I climbed up into one of the trees,” he thought. “I’d be above people’s heads and I could get a good view. And no-one would be able to see it was me up the tree. I’d just have to arrive early and leave when the crowd moved on.”

So that was what he did. Before the crowd gathered, Zacchaeus arrived at his chosen tree. Being short, he had a struggle to climb it, but, with a few scrapes and slips and a lot of pulling, he got high in the tree. “I can hide here,” he thought, “until I’ve seen Jesus and the crowd have moved away.”

It got noisier and noisier as the crowd got closer to where Zacchaeus hid. The crowd got bigger and bigger, and Jesus was in the middle of it, but Zacchaeus could see Jesus over the crowd.

Then everyone got a big surprise, especially Zacchaeus. You see, not only did Zacchaeus see Jesus, but Jesus saw Zacchaeus. And what do you think he did? He told Zacchaeus to get out of the tree! Then he said, “I’m coming to your house for a meal.” Zacchaeus was amazed, the crowd were amazed. “What does he want to go there for?” thought the crowd. “Doesn’t he know what sort of person this tax collector is?”

“Listen,” said Jesus, “this man is a son of Abraham too. Today, salvation has come to his house.”

Zacchaeus was overwhelmed. “Sir,” he said, “I’m sorry for all the wrong things I’ve done. If I’ve cheated anyone I’ll give them back four times as much.”

So Zacchaeus changed, and Jesus had tea.

We’ll make a model of Zacchaeus up the tree

Sing O Lord, all the world belongs to you <https://youtu.be/jJMaNZ84xsw?si=QFLkDXv0hLDXxM-T>

Let’s draw some pictures of what we like for tea

Let’s pray.

Dear God, help us to learn what you really want from us, and what you want us to do. Help us to learn to love you and other people too.

Amen

Sing He’s got the whole world in his hands <https://youtu.be/PJhV_6vrGaE>

Next Messy Church is 17th February. See you then.

Enjoy our celebration on the Harlington Methodist Church YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTMWR_QCxujkh1zHjTFcoJw>

Then have tea or a treat if it isn’t tea time!

If you send me pictures of anything you do, I will share them on the Church Facebook page (if you want to send pictures that you don’t want shared, just tell me. I’ll only share the one’s you’re happy to share.)

Harlington Messy Church Team

We’ll have a Zoom meeting open for those who can’t come to the church. Our end of Zoom will go on YouTube during the celebration, but we won’t put pictures from your end on. Contact me if you want the link for Zoom. Look out for the broadcast on the Harlington Methodist Church YouTube Channel. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTMWR_QCxujkh1zHjTFcoJw/videos>