

Topic: **Being Invitational – “See me. Oh please, see me.”**

Introduction

Today’s text has been made familiar by a children’s song that goes:

Zacchaeus was a wee little man, A wee little man was he.

(using both hands, make it look like you are showing the size of a very small man.)

He climbed up in the sycamore tree, the Savior for to see.

(using both hands act as though you are climbing up a tree.)

And when the Savior passed that way, He looked up in the tree,

(using your fingers, make it look as though someone is walking.)

And he said, “Zacchaeus, you come down from there;

For I’m going to your house today, for I’m going to your house today.”

(Start clapping your hands when singing this verse.)

http://www.dltk-bible.com/zacchaeus_song.htm

Background

This is a cute song that children remember (and the adults too)! Since the word “wee” is used to describe Zacchaeus, I think the song is Scottish in origin. We know, of course, the original text is a few thousand years older, so let us go back to the book of Luke and see why this account of Zacchaeus is so important. I am going to give us a clue. The story is not so much about Zacchaeus; rather, it is all about Jesus and how he sees people. Let us walk through Luke 19 and see what is really going on here.

The Text – Luke 19:1-10

1 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to die. This was toward the end of his earthly ministry. As he approached Jericho he told his disciples: **"We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again"** (Luke 18:31-33). This was not the news the disciples wanted to hear. They could not understand, they could see what Jesus was up to. They thought the journey to Jerusalem was to declare Jesus as Lord and to overthrow the oppressive Roman government. They would soon find out this was not to be the case.

As they entered Jericho just about 15 miles northeast of Jerusalem, a blind, persistent beggar cries out to Jesus. Jesus sees the man hidden in the crowd. Jesus stopped and asked the man, **“What do you want me to do for you?”** Is that not the question for each of us? What do I want Jesus to do for me? Some people want to be rich. Others want a happy life. Many of us just want help to make it through the day. What do you want Jesus to do for you? He is asking. What will you say today? The blind man says, **“I want to see!”** Jesus grants his request. The man sees, praises God, and begins to follow Jesus. All the people around them went wild with excitement. They had never seen anything like this! What a way to come into town.

2 A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. 3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

People were expecting Jesus. The word spread quickly through the town, “Rabbi Jesus is coming here! Come, let us go see him.” Jesus was well-known by this time and I am sure the whole town was there to greet him. Zacchaeus had heard all the commotion and ran to see what was going on. He was late in getting there, the crowds had already formed. I am sure anyone who has tried to see one of our presidential candidates up close has had a similar experience. It is hard to get to the front. You think a man of Zacchaeus’ influence could have pulled a few strings and been saved a front row seat. He was rich and important. In this vital industrial city which was known for its balsam production, he had a key role in overseeing a whole taxation system for the Roman government. Yes, Zacchaeus was wealthy and important, but not liked.

Why was Zacchaeus looking for Jesus?

Truth be known, Zacchaeus was probably deeply hated by his fellow Jews. He chose to deal with Gentiles. Unclean! He chose to collect money from his own people to give to a foreign oppressor. Traitor! Zacchaeus was a man who lived on the edges. The religious people kept their distance from him and the Romans probably just tolerated him. His only friends were the other outcast like him... people nobody saw. The people nobody noticed. Nobodies, as Kevin Sensenig calls them. Nobodies come in all shapes and sizes. They can be rich or poor. They can speak your language or a different one. What they all have in common is nobody really cares about them. Zacchaeus was a “nobody” in his own town, but even nobodies want to be seen.

Running ahead, Zacchaeus finds a sycamore-fig tree with low, strong branches. He scurries up just in time to see the whole parade. Can’t you just see them? The mayor, the city council, the head of the synagogue, the head of the police, and even the most recent winner of Judea Idol were all lined up to welcome Rabbi Jesus. The plan was to meet Jesus in the center of town, present him with the key to city, invite him to say a few words, and then take him to one of the homes of a rich and respected religious leader for dinner. That is how the scene should have unfolded, but it didn’t.

5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." 6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. 7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.' "

What did it cost Jesus to befriend Zacchaeus?

Jesus saw the man everyone else was trying hard not to see. Jesus walks right by all the important people. He invites himself to the home of one of Jericho’s biggest blemishes, the home of Zacchaeus, chief of the tax collectors. I don’t know if we can understand how radical and insulting this action was. Jesus ignores all protocol in this situation and takes things into his own hands. Jesus might as well slap those town people in the face. He chooses the bottom of the barrel over them. They were shamed and outraged. They began to mutter and grumble among themselves. Jesus did not make many friends in this town, but he did make one, Zacchaeus.

Is this not what the Bible is all about? Is this not the central theme of what God wants to say to you and me? God loves you and me so much that Jesus came to find us, truly see us, accept us, forgive us, and to restore us children of God. Hear it again. This is a costly demonstration of unexpected love. Like the shepherd who traverses wild terrain to find that one lost sheep, like the woman who will not rest until she finds that one lost coin, like the father who looks like a fool in order to rescue and restore his son, God will not let anything get in the way of reaching you or me. No mountain is high enough, no valley is deep enough, no river is wide enough to keep God away from you and me! No sin is bad enough, no habit is entrenched enough, no shame is thick enough to keep God from finding and freeing you and me in Christ. The God revealed in Jesus sees “nobodies” and transforms them into “somebodies”!

How did Zacchaeus respond to Jesus?

So how do you think Zacchaeus felt when Jesus saw him and went home with him? Zacchaeus was ecstatic! He was not invisible anymore. Someone saw him and wanted to be his friend. It is as if Zacchaeus had been living in the dark and now he could see. He could see he was a child of God. He could see that God really did love him. He could see that his life could be free of darkness. Zacchaeus knew now there would be no going back. He was no longer nobody. He was somebody in Jesus. The transformation had begun. No more living in a cocoon, he had wings to fly now.

Listen to what happened: *8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." 9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."*

In My World and Your World

“To see or not to see?” that is our question. Will you and I choose to see the people God has put in our path or will we walk by? I know it is hard to see people that are different or uncomfortable to be around. When I sense someone is a stranger, it is easy for me to look away and choose not to see them. I think Jesus wants us to see the people we most miss. I think Jesus wants you and me to notice, acknowledge, and welcome people who the world has forgotten.

1. Ways to see...the Newspaper

As you read the newspaper today, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in how and what you read. Look for people who may be easily forgotten. Think about the millions of people suffering in China and Myanmar. Read about one town or family. Stop and pray for them. I call these “flash prayers.” Ask God if there is something you are to do. Look for names of individuals. Stop and offer a prayer for the person who is in trouble, for the leaders who have important decisions to make, and for the family that is now in grief. Use the newspaper, the television, the internet as your binoculars to see the world as Jesus sees the world.

2. Ways to see...in our City

Who are the people we walk by everyday? Think about the people who have served you and me in the last week. Who are the people who served us at the restaurant? Did we notice them? Did we learn their names? Who was the person behind the counter at the dry cleaner or store in the mall? Who did we give our money to at the gas station or grocery store? Who did we pass

cutting grass, sweeping sidewalks, painting buildings, or just walking down the road? Did you ever notice the driver next to you or behind you? Take a look. Pray a flash prayer for them as well. Say hi to the people who clean your office or repair your car. Every time we acknowledge someone else, we give them value as being important, as a “somebody.” I know there are concerns about greeting people who may not be safe. Be street smart, but please be kind to people. Listen to the Holy Spirit for that one person you are to see and serve.

3. *Ways to See...the Children*

What about children? Children are easily missed because they are smaller and may not speak up. I want to thank all you people who are committed to serving our children.

- In our church many of you assist with the Sunday school, choir, and youth programs. Thank you.
- In this room there are many people who serve as teachers, counselors, volunteer tutors, and school administrators. Thank you for seeing and loving the children of this county.
- Parents and grandparents, thank you for serving and nurturing children. I know some of you have grandchildren and great-grandchildren. We know from the prayer requests we receive at our staff prayer time each week that you are very involved in their lives. Thank you for the vital ministry of parents and grandparents.
- There are more ways to serve this summer. Our church needs volunteers each week for Sunday school, for our Market Place Vacation Bible School in July, and even our Latino Fellowship, Resurrection Chapel, need help serving the children. Please contact Janet Ressler with the ways you can help.

4. *Ways to See...the Foreigner and Imprisoned*

Who are the people in Lancaster that are here, but hidden from our sight?

- Four blocks away there are 1,110 people incarcerated at the Lancaster County Prison. We know some of the people there. Some who have gotten out have come here for a church home.
- There are two colleges and a university within a 5 mile radius of our church. Combined they have over 15,000 students attending each year. Some choose to come here. All are welcomed, but most will need to be personally invited.
- There are 19 nursing facilities in our county. We welcome all who have come there.
- Three blocks from our church there are two different refugee agencies, Church World Service and Lutheran Refugee Services, who serve over 300 new refugees a year that come to Lancaster, Pa. These are people we can easily miss. These are people Jesus sees.

What can we do? We can choose to see and respond in new ways today.

- **iHope** - Next Sunday, June 1 before our combined 10am service, we will have a 9am meeting in Shirk Hall for all who want to learn how to welcome refugees. With agencies I mentioned (Church World Service and Lutheran Refugee Services) and Love, Inc. we are going to start a transitional home for refugees called iHope [International Homes of Hope – Lancaster]. By this fall, we want many people trained to be refugee sponsors and have a home up and running to welcome newcomers from other countries to Lancaster, Pa. You can be a part of this and so much more. **Let us open our eyes and see.**

Luke 19:1-10 Zacchaeus [Ζακχαῖος]

Then Jesus entered and walked through Jericho. There was a man there, his name Zacchaeus, the head tax man and quite rich. He wanted desperately to see Jesus, but the crowd was in his way—he was a short man and couldn't see over the crowd. So he ran on ahead and climbed up in a sycamore tree so he could see Jesus when he came by.

When Jesus got to the tree, he looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, hurry down. Today is my day to be a guest in your home." Zacchaeus scrambled out of the tree, hardly believing his good luck, delighted to take Jesus home with him. Everyone who saw the incident was indignant and grumped, "What business does he have getting cozy with this crook?"

Zacchaeus just stood there, a little stunned. He stammered apologetically, "Master, I give away half my income to the poor—and if I'm caught cheating, I pay four times the damages."

Jesus said, "Today is salvation day in this home! Here he is: Zacchaeus, son of Abraham! For the Son of Man came to find and restore the lost."