

Pentecost 21 11/3/19
Luke 19:1-10 26C

“TODAY SALVATION HAS COME TO THIS HOUSE, SINCE HE ALSO IS A SON OF ABRAHAM. FOR THE SON OF MAN CAME TO SEEK AND TO SAVE THE LOST.

If you are an avid watcher of the British Royals, you are well aware of the announcement that Prince Harry and his wife Meghan plan to withdraw from public life. It seems Harry and his American bride are the objects of the world’s fascination. Everyone wants to see them, and their five-month old son, Archie. So, after hectic months and frenzied day, they announced they are withdrawing from public life, for privacy and to raise their son in solitude. It seems being the objects of the world’s fascination is just too taxing for them.

Today, the Evangelist Luke draws our attention to another man. He, too, fascinated the world. Thousands clamored to see Him. This man promised help to the poor, and actually delivered on that promise. Here also was a man who had power, but never lorded it over anyone; a man who did not murder anyone, but who, Himself, was murdered. This man was Jesus.

And oh, how Zacchaeus wanted to see Him. You know the story of Zacchaeus, right?

Zacchaeus was a wee little man,
And a wee little man was he.
He climbed up in a sycamore tree
For the Lord he wanted to see.

And as the Savior passed that way
He looked up in the tree and he said,
'Zacchaeus you come down, For I'm going to your house today!
For I'm going to your house today!

Wow! Can you imagine how these words of Jesus must have shocked Zacchaeus? He was not a religious man. He didn't ever expect Jesus to notice him, or much less speak to him, or even less to want to eat with him. Nevertheless, Zacchaeus did not hesitate. Immediately, this chief tax collector "hurried and came down" out of that sycamore tree and the Bible says, Jesus "received Him joyfully (v. 6)."

And, the Evangelist tells us that when the crowd saw what was happening, they "all grumbled (v. 7)." You can hear their words, can't you? "What!?? This man of our fascination is going to be eating with a miserable, bad, well known sinner (cf. v. 7)! This is downright disgusting!" That was the thinking of the crowd.

And, why wouldn't they think that way, according to their human reason. Zacchaeus was not only a sinner, but in the eyes of the crowd, the "chief" sinner.

You see, Zacchaeus was not just a tax collector, he was the "chief" tax collector, which meant he oversaw many other collectors. And you know about tax collectors, don't you? Zacchaeus collected taxes from his neighbors for the hated Romans. And they were notoriously dishonest. They cheated, they stole from their neighbors to pad their own pockets, which is why Zacchaeus was rich.

Oh yes, Zacchaeus was rich in money, but he was not rich before God. And no one knew that more than Zacchaeus himself. For you see, no one needed to tell or remind Zacchaeus how bad he was, he knew he was a coveter, a cheat, a liar, a thief; he knew his sin. In himself, in his earthly money and goods, he had no hope.

You know how Zacchaeus felt, don't you? For the thoughts of your heart cause you to confess with the psalmist, "I know my transgressions

and my sin is ever before me" (Psalm 73:21). Yes, you say today to the Lord, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight" (Psalm 51:4).

Lusting after more and more money, failing to forgive a family member, being unconcerned about praying for your nation, for missions, or for the leaders of your country -- these are sins against God. Constantly whining and complaining, endlessly expressing no thanks for the many blessings God has given you, secretly buying lottery tickets, telling off-color jokes, not having family devotions; these are all evil in the sight of God. And, these are the things that you have done – and not done. So, you find yourself just like Zacchaeus, without hope.

But, along comes Jesus. And, that is GOOD NEWS for Zacchaeus and for you, Dear Child of God. For you see, if Zacchaeus could be loved and forgiven by Jesus, then you know Jesus loves and forgives you. If Jesus wanted to spend time with Zacchaeus, then you know Jesus wants to spend time with you, no matter who you are and no matter what you have done.

That is the message of the Gospel. The Bible asks: "Who will bring a charge against God's elect?" The Bible answers: "It is God who justifies (Ro 8:33)."

That's right – the Righteous Judge has declared you not guilty, innocent. No, it's not because you are better than your neighbor; nor the enormity of the tears you've cried in repentance; it's because of Jesus. God so loved the world that He sent His only-begotten Son into this world, born of human mother, so He could be fully human to suffer "once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God (1 Pe 3:18)." All of our coveting, our cheating, our lying, our stealing, our

discontentment; all of our sin was laid on Jesus. And He went to the cross to suffer the punishment and death of our sin. His blood was poured out upon the altar of the cross to cover over our sin. Our sin is gone in Christ, so God has no charge against us and declares us not guilty.

This is God's Gospel. A message of love with no conditions, no strings attached, and woe unto those who try to discredit all those who Christ qualifies by His mercy.

Zacchaeus rejoiced and was glad that salvation came to his house. And today salvation has come to this house!" Salvation comes where Jesus goes. Now today, this day, Jesus has come to this house, this house full of sinners. Salvation is here, because our Savior is here.

And, today your Savior comes here to this house, because you are here. Your Savior makes you His own child as He calls you out of your tree of self-righteousness; He calls you to come down from your tree of pride and arrogance as He drowns your sinful flesh in the waters of your Baptism. Yes, He drowns your sinful nature with all its unholy lusts and evil desires that He may raise you to a new life in Him.

And so that you may live as that new creation you are in Christ, He comes here to this house to eat with you. Your Jesus feeds you His life-giving body and blood to forgive you, strengthen you, so that you may turn from your sin to give glory to God in your service to your neighbor. And like Zacchaeus, we receive Him joyfully!

The Bible tells us Zacchaeus was "seeking to see" Jesus. So, Jesus didn't withdraw from public life in order to avoid the him. Quite the contrary, the Savior went out of His way to see this chief tax collector. Jesus promised and He does not deceive. He delivers His blessings He promised. Jesus did not trick people in order to enslave them. Instead,

Jesus brings people into His Kingdom where they are liberated. Jesus is indeed the One Isaiah, whom the prophet was talking about when he said Jesus would "bring Good News to the afflicted." He would "bind up the brokenhearted." He would "proclaim liberty to the captives," and Jesus would "set prisoners free."

Jesus is still promising today: love without conditions; mercy without interrogation; pardon without a price; and total forgiveness with no strings attached. For today, salvation comes to your house.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.