



## \*LOOK: “Really Seeing Others”

**Bible Text: Luke 19:1-9**

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\*Our Church is a part of a worldwide connection called the United Methodist Church. But being connected isn't easy. Right now, our bishops are working hard to try to prevent the United Methodist Church becoming the “Untied” Methodist Church over the issue of sexual identity and orientation, marriage and ordination.

But here's something we all should be able to agree about – male or female, rich or poor, young or old, gay or straight, black or brown or white, tall or short, wide or skinny – every human being is a beloved child of God. **Because if we can't agree on that, then God help us!**

**Can I get an amen?** God sent his Son, Jesus, into the world to save the whole world – what is that verse? **“God so loved the world!”**<sup>1</sup>

In Jesus, God breaks down the barriers of difference and race and nation and culture and language and gender and age and tenure and entitlement, and sin and any other difference between people.

This week's Bible text takes up that topic. It is the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19. So, let's open our Bibles to the text. Jesus was passing through Jericho and Luke 19:2 says: **“A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich.”**<sup>2</sup>

We know three things about this man from only a single verse. We know his name – Zacchaeus. We know he was wealthy. And we also know his job was hated – tax collector for the Roman version of the IRS. It would still be unpopular today. Sad but true.

<sup>1</sup> John 3:16, many translations.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 19:2, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*. Copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Luke 19:3 tells us more. *\*“He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short...”*<sup>3</sup>

So we get it. He was short. They probably called him “Shorty” or “Half-pint.” No different than “Skinny,” “Pudge,” “Stringbean,” “Stilt,” “Airhead,” “Eagle Beak” or other derogatory names we use.

And because we notice those things first, we miss more substantive things, like we do in verse 2. The most important thing is that Zacchaeus was trying to see Jesus. **He was interested in Jesus.**

Despite being a social outcast in an unpopular profession, we find out later in the passage that he was not only wealthy, but dishonest too. Fred Buechner says of him: *\*“He was a sawed-off social disaster with a big bank account and crooked job.”*<sup>4</sup>

**But despite all this - he was interested in Jesus. And we miss that.** Most of us learned about Zacchaeus by singing a Sunday School song. My grandkids learned it from Bob and Larry on Veggie Tales. *\**

(VEGGIE TALES SINGING "ZACCHAEUS")

*“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 that tree. And He said...”*

But what if we saw this as the story of a real person, instead of a veggie tales story, or someone who lived so long ago they don't matter? What if we saw him as someone we might see at the grocery store, or coffeehouse, or Quik Trip? Wouldn't it help us to see him, or see anyone we meet, as just as human as we are?

**But we know more about Zacchaeus.**

We not only know that Zacchaeus was interested in Jesus – **We know that Jesus was interested in him.**

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Luke 19:3, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

<sup>4</sup> Fredrick Beuchner, *Peculiar Treasures*, Copyright 1993, HarperOne, p.180).

Look at Luke 19:5-6. Jesus looked up and saw Zacchaeus in the Sycamore tree and looked up and said, *\*“Hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today. And (Zacchaeus) hurried down...”*<sup>5</sup>

Zacchaeus was happy about that. But not everyone was. Not the religious people who turned out to welcome Jesus. They were indignant. Zacchaeus wasn't one of them! Jesus was supposed to talk to them. They were the religious folks! Look at verse 7: *\*“All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.”*<sup>6</sup> **How dare Jesus! I mean really!**

They couldn't see past his stature, profession, and dishonest ways – they couldn't see him as a beloved child of God. **But Jesus did!**

But Zacchaeus' experience with Jesus brought him something he had not expected. Look at verse eight: *\*“Zacchaeus ... said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor.’”* That takes some doing! His life changed - and even more than that!

Read on: *\*“If I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”*<sup>7</sup> Something happened to cause that kind of new life – that kind of life change! I mean, think about it!

He went from being an angry little man, who didn't care for anyone to someone who cared enough to do something about it! My goodness - for the love of God - what might happen to the world if more of us could experience that kind of transformation?

In his book, *\*Jesus for President*, Shane Claiborne makes the point that we can't vote for Jesus – he's not running for president.

He would probably be considered unelectable – too many would never vote for him. Too passionate about poverty and justice!

<sup>5</sup> Op. Cit. Luke 19:5-6, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Luke 19:7, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

<sup>7</sup> Luke 19:8. *New International Version*. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® All rights reserved worldwide.

But that's not Shane's his point! His point is - Jesus votes for us. He gave his life for all of us. He voted for people like "*Short Stuff Zacchaeus*," and other people we would never talk too.

**And he votes for you.** He gave his life for you! And for them. He takes the initiative! He doesn't wait for you to have it all together, to be a better person, to deserve his love. He accepts you now.

The great theologian Paul Tillich said: *\*"You are accepted. You are accepted, accepted by that which is greater than you. Do nothing now, later you will do much. Simply accept that you are accepted."*

As we read the story in Luke that's what happened for Zacchaeus. In Christ's love Zacchaeus experienced the one thing that changed his life, the one thing he needed. He was accepted. He was loved. And thanks be to God – that's the new life we can experience too!

**That's the Good News!** Jesus himself gave me the punch line for this morning's sermon in Luke 19, verse 10, just one verse after the text. *\*"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*<sup>8</sup>

He came to save the world. God isn't about separation, but inclusion and unity. Jesus made it possible for anyone to be included in the people and promises of God – anyone! Look at Galatians 3:28: *\*"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*<sup>9</sup>

"Many years ago, my perspective on diversity was forever altered by the strong words of Dr. Gil Caldwell from the United Methodist General Commission on Religion and Race.

I grew up in the turbulent 1960's in Kansas City. I already believed the prejudice I saw in society was deeply wrong.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Luke 19:10, New International Version.

<sup>9</sup> Galatians 3:28, English Standard Version – ESV. © Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

I made a vow in college to avoid prejudice and seek neutrality. But Dr. Caldwell punctured all my illusions and intentions when he said:

*\*“You can’t be neutral on the subject of race. You are either are a racist or an anti-racist. There is no neutral. Nothing ever changes by people being neutral.”*

**He was right.** Jesus wasn’t neutral. He loved everyone, even when it was unpopular. Over and over again he reached out across barriers and boundaries of race, class, gender, income and age – to the outcast, the sinful, the fallen, the broken – to the short and tall, large and small, Jews and Samaritans and Gentiles like us.

Thank God he still does, or none of us would be acceptable or welcome here. But because he sees us, really sees us, and still loves us we are reconciled, healed, restored and forgiven.

What might happen if we could see people through the lens of God’s love for them and for all creation, and with hearts as wide open as the arms of Jesus? **For the love of God isn’t about time we did?**

Join me in prayer that we may learn to see in new ways.