

“Jesus & _____”
Fill in your name

**First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson
February 2, 2020**

New Testament Lesson: Luke 19:1-10

Old Testament Lesson: Psalm 121:1-2, 7-8

It was about 5 p.m. two Thursdays ago and I was coming out of Westminster Hall when I saw someone trying to take the Mahomes jersey off the statue across the street. Byron Constance had dressed up his stature as a wonderfully visible – Go Chiefs! So I yelled to the guy to stop messing with the jersey; that if it's not his he should leave it alone.

He stopped, and I could hear him grumbling as he headed down the street. (That jersey has since been stolen by somebody else, according to Byron's surveillance camera.) And there's a new jersey up there now, miraculously, no doubt.

Anyway, it wasn't until I was studying today's scripture passage about Jesus and Zacchaeus that I asked myself that age-old question – what would Jesus do? Would Jesus have yelled at the guy to stop stealing, or would he have ventured closer to find out why the guy felt a need to have the Jersey?

If I had ventured a little closer, I wonder what I might have discovered – about the guy and about myself. Of course, safety first. I try very hard to not put myself in danger when helping people. But still, did I really need to yell at the guy? Scold him?

The truth is, I didn't stop to ask those questions that night. But I'm asking them now, in the safety of this sanctuary. I'm asking myself what if any risk would Jesus have had me take, and what might I have discovered about myself, my faith, and the Lord.

What are we willing to risk in getting closer to Jesus, going where Jesus is leading us, making new discoveries about our neighborhoods, our friends and family members, our enemies, discovering new things about ourselves?

That's what today's scripture passage asks us to consider. In your Bibles, it's titled Jesus and Zacchaeus. In your heart, let it be titled Jesus and you (Ed); or Jesus and (Peggy); Jesus and you fill-in-your-name. Say it with me now, filling in your own name: Jesus and (blank/your name); Let's do that again, together on three: One, two, three – Jesus and Dave. Say it again, quietly to yourself right now. Jesus and Dave.

What would it be like, to go through life, forever and always, Jesus and Dave, hand-in-hand, top of mind, driving each and every thought and action? What would it be like, what would it take for you to go through life, just Jesus and you – Jesus, you and your life – that messy, scary, uncertain, self-righteous and yes, sometimes, self-sacrificing life that we are all living?

Well, let's ask Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was a chief tax-collector and this gave him a certain perception of himself. It dictated where he went, who he spoke with, what he said, who he got close to, and who he avoided. That's who Zacchaeus was – chief tax-collector, and says Luke, "he ... was rich."

Despite his power and wealth, Luke tell us, "He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature." Zacchaeus had a need he could not fulfill with all the money and power in the world.

We see that with Jesus, don't we? It doesn't matter if you're rich or poor, well-known around town or a nobody, healthy or ill, or what type of handicap you have in life (and we all have them). None of this matters when it comes to drawing close to Jesus and being blessed by his transformational Spirit.

All that does matter is being willing to risk whatever it takes to draw close to Jesus, and then let the Lord work in your life to change you, challenge you, grow you in wonderful, surprising ways.

Through his encounter with Jesus, Zacchaeus was changed, challenged and stretched in wonderful, surprising ways. First, he was brought down to earth. After running ahead and climbing a sycamore tree to get a look at Jesus, Zacchaeus is blessed with something much more wonderful than merely glimpsing Jesus from afar. Zacchaeus is blessed because Jesus noticed he is looking for him. Jesus is looking for Zacchaeus: Jesus is looking for you. So Jesus says, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today."

If you don't think being on the lookout for Jesus, welcoming him into your house, having a place for him there, allowing him to linger with you doesn't change a person, Well, it does. Trust me; try it. Make a place for just Jesus and you in your home and sit there with the Lord each day.

But Dave! That's challenging; I have lots to do. That's risky; I like who I am. That's scary; I don't know how Jesus might change me.

And yet, think of the faith that it took for Zacchaeus – sinner that he is – to make a place for Jesus in his life. That simple act of welcoming Jesus into his home changed, challenged and stretched Zacchaeus in wonderful and surprising ways. Do you think Zacchaeus ever imagined himself giving up his wealth? And yet, that’s just what happened.

“Look,” he said, “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.” That’s a pledge to make amends for what he did and to change who he is – no longer demanding four times as much tax from people as they owe.

That’s the type of life-changing pledge Jesus asks of us. Because of the Lord’s devotion to the poor and marginalized in this world, those who have much will always be asked to give much. And that’s risky, that’s challenging, that’s a stretch – whether we’re talking money, time, energy, imagination or whatever gifts you have. All of us are called to use our giftedness to bless the lives of others, even though that’s a challenge for us. Giving of yourself is always a challenge if you’re giving as Jesus would have you give.

The reason many people embrace this challenge as followers of Christ is, well, unreasonable. There is no earthly reason to risk being a follower of Jesus, and no earthly guarantee you’re going to be blessed in the process. Maybe that’s why so many people don’t bother looking for Jesus – up a tree or anywhere else – and certainly not at church.

Even people who are willing to sacrifice what it takes to look for Jesus at church – even us – we struggle to look beyond the safety of these walls. We struggle to hear what Jesus is calling us to, in making a change in our lives, in challenging us to go places we wouldn’t otherwise go, talk to people who are really different from us, and stretch ourselves to become a different person in the process, someone willing to give and risk even just a little bit more for Jesus.

There’s no reason on earth to do that, except when you’re in the company of Jesus. Jesus and you – Jesus, you and your life – that messy, scary, uncertain, self-righteous and yes, sometimes, self-sacrificing life that we are all living?

Zacchaeus had a need that led him to risk everything just to get a glimpse of Jesus. Zacchaeus needed to be a bigger man than he knew himself to be. And by running after Jesus, climbing the highest heights, coming down to earth, Zacchaeus became a bigger man – not in an earthly, physical way – but in a heavenly, spiritual way.

It was then that Jesus said to him, “Today, salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”

Where are you lost in your growth as a follower of Christ? Where is God calling you to look for the risen Lord in this world, in your life, in your home?

Wherever it is, it's going to take a certain amount of risk on your part to go there. And the reward may not be apparent to you now. But do it anyway. Take a risk for Jesus – because “today, salvation (will) come to (your) house,” as you take on your identity as “a son (or daughter) of Abraham (and Sarah),” as someone who knows yourself to be in need of more Jesus in your life, and is willing to risk doing what it takes to draw closer to the Lord. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Let us pray:

Merciful Savior, God of redemption, salvation and restoration, we praise you that nothing is beyond your ability to use for your purposes.

You desire our holiness and wholeness. Even our mistakes, failures and regrets are fodder for good in your hands.

We ask your comfort and peace for those who grieve. We pray your divine intervention for all those we keep in our hearts and prayers. And for us, Lord, grant the vision and eternal hope to shape the living of our days to your will, for in all that we do, we belong to you.

For the sake of Christ we pray, raising our eyes to heaven and our voices in the song of the Lord's Prayer:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**