

A Lunch Invitation

Year C

Season of Pentecost

Sunday Between October 30 and November 5 Inclusive

October 31, 2010, 23rd Sunday After Pentecost

Read the Bible passage: [Luke 19:1-10](#), The Message; or [Luke 19:1-10](#), The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

Faith-provoking, historical insights into the lesson by [David Ewart, Luke 19:1-10](#) .

Click here: [George Hermanson's sermon](#), for an easy to print or email Adobe PDF version of this sermon.

The Rev. Dr. George Hermanson

Note: This sermon was preached November 4, 2007 at Edwards (Knox) United Church.

This morning we have this story of Zacchaeus. We often use it as a cute children's story about having faith. We tell how short little Zacchaeus climbed a tree to see Jesus. However, this is not how the story goes. The thing is, Zacchaeus wasn't a cute little Danny DeVito type character. He was a short, nasty man, who was a dirty collaborator with Rome. He was the chief tax collector, which meant he had many more dirty stealing tax collectors working for him. In a busy cosmopolitan place, he got rich by collecting tolls from all who traveled the roads. He did this for the hated empire. He was part of the reason why life was so miserable for the people of his time.

And yet, Jesus, in his own bizarre way, decides that Zacchaeus deserved to be given the gift of salvation. Instead of helping the downtrodden, Jesus goes to the home of the richest, foulest man in the province. It is another one of the actions of Jesus hanging out with a despised outsider.

What is neat about the story is that Luke does not allow us to demonize Zacchaeus. For one thing he has a name, unlike the many nameless characters in Luke's stories. Not only does he have a name we get physical description - so short he had to climb a tree to see Jesus.

Luke gives a feel for the context, for Jesus sounds playful. He waves at Zacchaeus and says, "Come on down. Hurry, I am coming to eat with you today."

Jesus invites himself over to Zacchaeus' house. This is important - Jesus invites himself. A nice touch. They walk off in a festive mood. Christ and the crook. They are going to share hospitality. Christ and the crook walking to the table, arm in arm. Off to share some bread and wine.

Onlookers could only shake their head. There he goes again, this Jesus. Breaking the rules. Ignoring the proper, religious people and going off with another sinner. Breaking all the rules about purity and honor. Christ and the crook off to lunch.

Wait. Here is the surprise. Before they even get to lunch Zacchaeus does an about face - literally he repents of his ways - commits himself to doing justice. Listen closely. Jesus does not dump on him. He does not admonish him. He does not blame him for his life. Instead he offers him hospitality, generosity, understanding. Jesus breaks across class lines, purity codes and invites himself in. Luke wants us to see a God who offers grace before we seek or ask it. It is Zacchaeus who wakes up, gives a realistic assessment of his life.

Impulsively Zacchaeus says that from this moment on "I will share my wealth." He moves from taker to a giver. He has much so he can give much. In that moment he recognized that he has participated in systemic injustice. He earned his living by a system that is set up to be unjust. Systemic injustice is the system that maintains inherited disparities, increases the distance between the rich and the poor. So he moved to address this by sharing his wealth. This is not just personal piety because he is realistic. He knows the source of his wealth. He knows that it is the oppressive system that has deluded him. In Jesus' hospitality he finds the power of compassion that will help him transform a sin - fostering society. He connects the public with the private.

We see this when he goes on to say that, "If I have acted personally dishonestly, I will offer repayment." Notice this first action was in the present tense. Then he shifts to the future tense: "I will give." He knows he is stuck in a immoral system so he begins to take personal responsibility. He is awakened to his participation and maintenance of the system and its God-hostile values.

Then Jesus says an interesting thing. Through Zacchaeus' actions the presence of God, the sense of God, the kingdom of God is made manifest. Through Zacchaeus - the repenting crook. Not through Jesus. Jesus is there offering the hospitality of the kingdom of God, and it is Zacchaeus that makes it concrete, makes the kingdom real in the present time and space. This less than perfect, this seeking, this very real human being makes the kingdom present.

This is shocking, for it affirms our role in making the reality of God present. It is we who make the reality of the kingdom active in our world. If it is true for Zacchaeus it is true for us. It is through ordinary people trying to live justly, love kindly and walk humbly with God that the kingdom appears - is brought into being in our world by our actions.

This is a bold statement in our world where many are not sure that God is real or active in our world. It is an affirmation that we are the witness to, and the actors who make concrete the sense of God around us, in us, and for us. It is the meaning of sainthood - all the saints are ordinary people who act to bring the kingdom into being.

George Hermanson

May the Lure be with you

The story invites us to pure and playful grace - a grace that calls us to free ourselves and others from the ideas and systems of oppression. There is nothing and nobody outside of God's love. It is an affirmation that the aim of love is in us and we can practice loving hospitality.

Frank Rogers, who teaches Religious Education at Claremont School of Theology in California says

We believe God is present, hoping and urging, in the midst of all of the situations of life. As Christians, we believe that God is passionately involved in human affairs and intimately involved in all our questioning.

Moreover, we believe God's involvement in our lives has purpose and direction. God is seeking to bring healing and wholeness and reconciliation, transforming this broken world into that New Creation where there will be no more sadness or injustice or pain. Our decisions and our search for guidance take place in the active presence of a God who intimately cares about our life situations and who invites us to participate in the divine activities of healing and transformation. (Thanks to James Murray for the quote.)

Just as in the story where Jesus stands with Zacchaeus, offering hospitality, we have experienced those who trusted us - that we have insight to be more than we are. Those saints that said quietly to us, I am with you and you have the power to feed me. Trusted us. Knew us. In response we woke up and changed our direction. As we come to the table to be fed on the bread of life, in silent reflection, think of those who stood with you - the ones who enabled your transformation. Created the context of hospitality so you became the reality of love of God, so it could be experienced - think of those people in the silence.

George Hermanson

www.georgehermanson.com