

**Sermon**  
**St. Mary's Nanoose**  
**October 30, 2016.**  
**Luke 19:1-10 (Zacchaeus)**

I speak to you of the kingdom, the power and the glory.

Amen.

This has been a week full of information, inspiration, and challenge. On Tuesday, I attended a Clergy Day with the Primate, Fred Hiltz; on Thursday I sat on Diocesan Council, and this weekend; Jim and I attended the Diocesan Conference on “Prayer” with keynote speaker, Herbie O’Driscoll.

Over this past week I heard about and talked about reconciliation, pilgrimage and prayer. Logan, our Bishop, announced a Year of Reconciliation that will start the first Sunday of Advent, which is coming up quickly. I’ll tell you more as the date grows closer.

And in our gospel reading today from Luke, we hear the wonderful story of Zacchaeus, the tax collector of short stature. You may be wondering - How am I going to tie together what I learned this week with our reading today? Hang on, I’m going to let the Holy Spirit do its thing!

I love the little story of Zacchaeus because it’s so easy to imagine the scene. A crowd gathers in the town of Jericho – curious about the roaming rabbi whom everyone is talking about. Jesus enters town with his followers and people crowd around him. Now imagine Zacchaeus, a well-to-do member of the village, dressed as fit a man of his status, standing in that crowd, curious about the commotion, hearing snippets of conversation as people talk about

Jesus and the healings ascribed to him. Some are openly curious, others skeptical, and yet others condemn this miracle worker as an imposter.

Zacchaeus, disliked by his fellow villagers for his allegiance to the Romans, tries to elbow his way to where he can see Jesus moving through the crowd, but no one moves aside for him. Being a short man, he can't see a thing.

Then suddenly, he begins running ahead, away from the crowd to where Jesus will pass. He shimmies up a tree so he can get a better view. Wait a minute. This is crazy! A well-dressed man from the wealthy part of town, scrambling up a tree!? What possesses Zacchaeus to do such an undignified thing? This is worth pondering.

And then the next thing we hear is that Jesus passes under that tree and looks up. With all that was going on around him; people wanting to touch him, pressing in on him, asking him questions, begging to be healed, why on earth does Jesus look up? This too is worth pondering.

And now Jesus does the thing that really rankles the people. He acknowledges Zacchaeus briefly and tells him to come down and says, "I'm coming to *your* house to stay." What?? All these important people in the village were hoping, maybe assuming that Jesus would stay with them; the village leaders, or the religious leaders; the ones who could put on a feast and impress him. And who in turn, could boast afterwards that they had hosted him.

But no, Jesus sees something in Zacchaeus and *calls it out* of him; at the same time giving the clear message to those grumbling

about his decision to eat with a sinner – “The Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”

Over and over, in the gospels we see and hear Jesus shaking people up. He wasn't about making people feel comfortable. He challenged the status quo by showing them that God is interested in *hearts*, not property, wealth or status. God, through Jesus, calls back into relationship all those who have made poor choices, who have gone astray, who have lost purpose, who are pursuing goals that do not serve God or neighbour. Jesus came to tell us explicitly that there is nowhere to hide from, no point of no return from, and nothing that comes close to - the love of God.

But because humans were given free will; Jesus can only save those who want to be saved. And something in Zacchaeus wanted saving, something made him climb that tree, something made him not care what others thought, something made him act even though he had no idea what was going to transpire. His longing changed his life; his need opened him. And God saw, and responded.

What crowds in on us and makes us forget what's important in life? What keeps us busy with all the demands of life so that we forget what's important? What do we let get in the way of our relationship with God?

The desire for relationship with God is built into our hearts. We know that now from science.... the heart organ has an intelligence of its own. The heart responds. The heart yearns for connection - with God and with others.

And yet we get busy with things we think are urgent, and ignore the yearnings of our heart. We get caught up in the dramas of our day-to-day lives and forget what is really important.

When Jim and I owned our own business, we brought in an advisor to help us through a difficult growth spurt. After observing us at work for a few days, he commented, “You take care of the urgent things that come at you every day, but you don’t get to addressing the important things.” In other words, we were reacting instead of acting.

This happens all the time. We react instead of act. We let the outside world determine our priorities.

On Friday night, Jim and I stayed in a hotel in Nanaimo near St. Paul’s where the Diocesan conference was held. In the morning, we headed down for the breakfast that was included in our stay. The TV was on and news about the impending American election blaring. I could feel my heart beat quicken. My thoughts started racing. There were families there, staring at the screen and not interacting with each other. I started to feel really sad. And then I remembered that we were in town for a conference on prayer. So I sat with my back to the TV, tuned it out, and focused on enjoying a rare meal with my husband. I wasn’t going to let the outside world determine my experience.

Do we let others determine what is important? Do we resist the drama that gossip generates? Do we take time to listen to the urgings of our own heart?

I intended the Diocesan Conference on “Prayer” because I wanted to support the work the people of this diocese are doing.

Frankly, I did not really need one more activity in my week and I was tired when we arrived yesterday morning at St. Paul's. I wasn't particularly open or enthusiastic about what the day might hold. Rather I was thinking about the sermon I had to write, and all the other things on my "to-do" list. Yet, minutes into our morning prayer time, I felt my heart soften and my thoughts settle and the music transported me. Suddenly, I was fully present and ready to receive whatever God was offering me. And God had a lot in store for me. I came away inspired and rejuvenated. Herbie O'Driscoll prompted us to look back at our lives to see how God has spoken to us through people, events and words. I saw how responsive God is, and has been. I saw how my part was to seek God and be present. I received my sermon without even knowing it until later in the day!

What have you done in your life that opened you up to God? When have you put yourself out there not knowing what would happen and all of a sudden felt the eyes of God upon you? When did you acknowledge that you couldn't see and needed to do something about it? When have you gone out on a limb to see what God was doing?

The story of Zacchaeus gives us all the opportunity to stop and think; to stop and reflect. In all our busy-ness, are we taking time to do what is really important in our lives?

Doing what's important usually takes a little shift in perception. Doing what's important means changing how we *view* our lives. If God is about reconciling the world to God's self, then every moment of

every day is alive with possibility for moving towards that loving embrace.

If we see our lives as a pilgrimage towards God, and every moment as the invitation to draw closer, then we will see that all the events of our lives are not a problems or obstacles or things to “get through,” but opportunities to open our hearts, minds and ears to hear how God is calling to us to invite God in.

It was an ordinary day when Zacchaeus woke up. He could easily have gone about his day as usual. But then again, maybe not. Perhaps no one came to the tax booth to do business, maybe the town was a buzz with stories about this strange roving rabbi, maybe someone had grabbed him and said, “C’mon, Zacchaeus, you have to come and see this guy. He’s amazing!” We don’t know what happened before he decided to climb the tree. But we do know that in his desire to see Jesus, Jesus saw him. And his life changed in that moment.

We all have our own stories of a time when we responded to an urging and discovered the presence of Jesus. Some of our stories are of a dramatic encounter; others tell of a more gradual and deepening relationship. But Jesus is still moving amongst us, and the story is not over.

So can you, today, put aside the demands of your life, and listen, if just for a few minutes, to the beating and urging of your heart? Your heart, that part of you that yearns to be reconciled with a loving God who has waited patiently all this time for you to notice and invite God home into your heart?

Let our meal together this morning remind us of our faithful God who walks amongst us; who longs to be seen and is ready to respond to our unspoken invitation.

Amen.