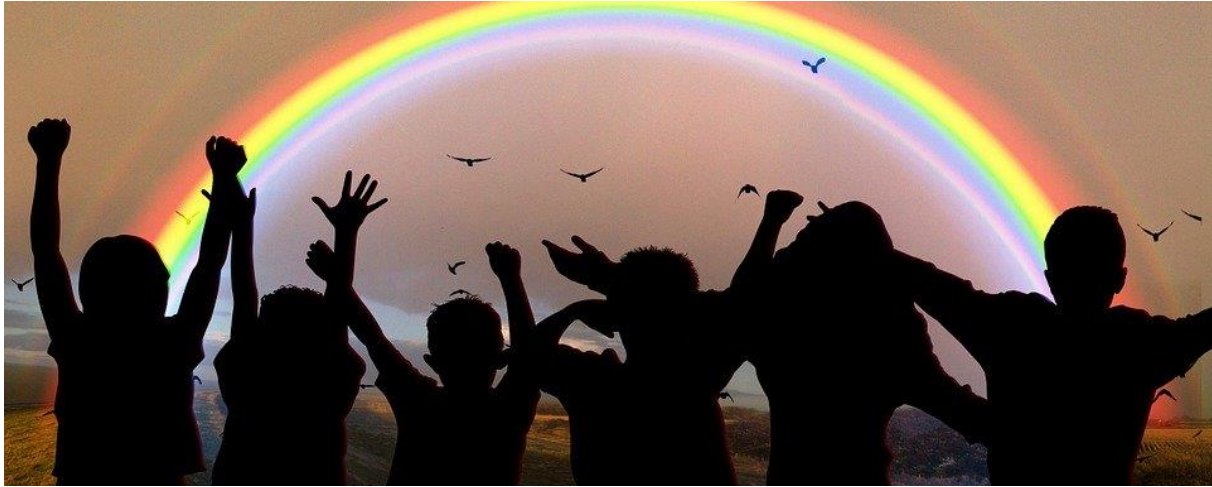


Seen by Jesus.... Talking with Jesus.... Living with Jesus!

Sermon for the 14th Sunday after Trinity

Sermon Text: Luke 19:1-10



He entered Jericho and was passing through. ² And there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³ And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small of stature. ⁴ So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was about to pass that way. ⁵ And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." ⁶ So he hurried and came down and received Him joyfully. ⁷ And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." ⁸ And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." ⁹ And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

He was a man named Zacchaeus. That means "the righteous"! Zacchaeus was probably his family's greatest hope. Perhaps his parents hoped that their son would be a good role model for others. Someone others could look up to. And a son his parents could be proud of. It turned out differently. Already as a small boy, Zacchaeus didn't shy away from stealing. And then he also lied. The small sins of his youth later became a habit. And so, it was only a small step for the young Zacchaeus to go into tax collecting. With the strength of the Roman Empire behind him, he could lie, exploit, cheat, and suppress.... as much as he wanted. And so, the little crook got something. He got rich. Very rich. And he became influential. He even became the chief tax collector. But no one wanted to be near Zacchaeus. And that's why he was isolated from other people. Inwardly, the heart of Zacchaeus was like a storm. On the one hand, he was plagued by the terrible deeds he had done. On the other hand, he was plagued by the awful separation from God and the feeling of being abandoned by other people. It seems to me that it is not good for the human heart to be alone! Alone with only the condemning conscience. One's own wickedness as well as the wickedness of others becomes bigger and bigger in the dark chamber of the

heart. And all the wealth of the world can never bring peace to this heart. It seems to me that all sin needs to really get out of hand is the secrecy of the heart. Not only can someone hide evil in this secrecy, but that same evil can grow bigger and bigger. That is a very dangerous thing. The famous Persian poet, Maulana Rumi, writes: “an evil thought begins as an ant and when it grows up, it becomes a dragon.” It was already so with Adam and Eve. After their sin, they had to hide their sin with a fig leaf. Their son Cain let envy grow in his heart, which later led to the terrible outcome of murder. Zacchaeus is just one example of how this happens to all of us. I think we know this in one way or another. Someone says something bad to you. And those words remain in your heart. You can’t free yourself from them. And you feel the hurt and anger. Even hate. That’s not a good feeling. And the feeling doesn’t bring forth any good fruit either. The story of Zacchaeus is a story about how Jesus frees us from such feelings of the heart. It is a story about how Jesus seeks and saves the lost. Jesus does this by:

1. Seeing what is hiding
2. Speaking with us
3. Dwelling among us

The story of Zacchaeus changed the moment Jesus saw Zacchaeus—Jesus was actually only passing through. A large crowd of people were around Him. It’s hard to imagine that Jesus could see and recognize little Zacchaeus in his hiding place. No one, but Jesus, can do that. His eyes fell upon the man who was barely visible. Jesus saw Zacchaeus. And Zacchaeus saw Jesus. Jesus saw deep into the heart of Zacchaeus and recognized Zacchaeus for who he was. There is a world of meaning within this word “to see!” As God created the world, it says: “God saw!” And then God said again: “See! It is good!” Jesus saw this Zacchaeus with the eyes of the Creator! His eyes could pierce through the walls that Zacchaeus had built around his heart. Jesus saw Zacchaeus not only how he was as a sinner, but He saw him as He always wanted Zacchaeus to be. Jesus didn’t only see the wickedness, but He could also see the child! A child who should be as God wanted him to be. A child that God wanted to be proud of. A Zacchaeus! A righteous one! Do you want to be seen by God? Do you feel lost in the great story of the world? Or do you feel down and overwhelmed by many bad thoughts and experiences? Have people treated you badly and you can’t free yourself from this evil? Perhaps you have also allowed the little ant, “Hate,” to build a nest in your heart, and now the ant has become a dragon. If that’s so, you need to know that God sees you. With Psalm 139 you can pray: “You have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You discern my thoughts from afar.” God is right by you and He sees you not only as you are, but He also sees you as He wants you to be. As Jesus came to the sycamore tree where Zacchaeus was sitting, He not only saw him, but left everything and gave Zacchaeus His full attention, saying:

“Zacchaeus, hurry down...”

And then everything happened very quickly. Zacchaeus, who, before, had to hide himself in a tree, suddenly came into sight and stood exactly where Jesus was. What a picture! On one the side stood Jesus, who had never sinned, and on the other side stood Zacchaeus, the famous criminal! It was a picture that many couldn’t stand to see, and they were appalled by it. “Look at that! He sits and eats with sinners and tax collectors!” said the Pharisees. They later mocked Jesus hanging next to murderers on the cross. Yes, exactly! Jesus never shunned the sinners. Rather, He sought them out and was near to them. He sought them out because He wanted to save them. That’s why He came to us. When Jesus speaks with us still today, then this is always the only thing He wants. He wants to restore the

relationship between God and those of us who are lost. That's why we never need to be ashamed to be in the presence of Jesus. Neither do we ever need to hide from Jesus. Quite the opposite! Precisely then, when we stand before Him with all our weakness and sins, He takes us in His arms and receives us. Whoever wants to continue hiding in his tree or behind something else, can of course do so. But that person then stays by himself with his sin. That's why Jesus calls to Zacchaeus: Hurry up! Come right down from that tree where you hid yourself. You can't just stay there! You may also be with this Jesus, who understands you so well and who can heal you! Jesus wants us all to come down from our various trees where we have hidden ourselves. And Jesus seeks us! No path is too far for Him!

The day Zacchaeus came down from his tree, his life changed radically. Jesus not only spoke with Zacchaeus but went with him to his house and stayed with him. Through Jesus, Zacchaeus suddenly had the confidence to open his heart. He could speak openly and freely about all his problems. He could talk about how he had done other wrong. Not only that. Zacchaeus made right the wrongs he had done. He settled his debts and repaid the people more than he had to. But best of all were the words of our Lord: "Today salvation has come to this house." That means that peace has come! It means that the heart is free! It means that God has come to the house. We can also experience this joy from the story of Zacchaeus. Oh, how urgently we need this freedom! Oh, how urgently we need this peace! Oh, how urgently we need Jesus! And the peace that surpasses all understanding preserve our hearts and minds... because Jesus has made a dwelling among us! Amen.