

## An unusual event

Luke 19, 1-10

Introduction: Has something totally unusual ever happened to you? I don't mean unusual in such a fashion that a little green man knocks on the door and tells you that he wants to take you on a trip to another planet. But something unusual that would somehow still accommodate with your own experience. For example, winning the lottery. Or getting a letter from someone you didn't expect.

We actually love unusual things. Because they are surprising and add a little color to normal, boring life. They are like flowers by the side of the road that give us a little joy. On the other hand, we get scared when something unusual throws us off track, confuses us, or sets us back in our routine.

There are many unusual stories in the Bible. For example, the story of Moses and the burning bush. A bush that burns but doesn't burn up - that's really extraordinary! Or the story of Jesus walking on water. Normally no human can walk on water, but Jesus did it to show that he is special and that God works through him. And then there is the resurrection of Jesus - the most unusual thing of all, which shows that God is stronger than death.

Second part:

We are talking about unusual things today. Sometimes it is absolutely necessary for unusual things to happen. It can easily happen that through the daily grind and through many bad experiences we end up on a path that is not good at all. Sometimes it can be grief that grows ever greater... sometimes it can also happen that love for family members becomes less and less. On days like these, we humans need something unusual that takes us out of the daily grind so that we can make a completely new start. I want to tell you such a story today. It is the story of Zacchaeus. We read Luke 19: 1-10

*19 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. <sup>2</sup> A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. <sup>3</sup> He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. <sup>4</sup> So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. <sup>5</sup> When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." <sup>6</sup> So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. <sup>7</sup> All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner." <sup>8</sup> But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." <sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*

He was a man named Zacchaeus. That means "the righteous one"! Zacchaeus was probably his family's great 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. Things turned out differently. Even as a small boy, Zacchaeus was not afraid to steal. And then he also lied. The little sins of youth later became habits. And so it was only a small step for young Zacchaeus to go to the tax collectors office. The tax collectors were fraudsters by profession and could even

count on the power of the Roman state of the time, which supported them when people complained against them. With the power of the Roman state behind him, the Zacchaeus from our story could lie, exploit, cheat and oppress... as much as he wanted. And so the little crook did make it to the top of society. He became rich. Very rich. And he became influential. Even a chief tax collector. There was just one problem. No one wanted to be near Zacchaeus. And so he was isolated from other people and lonely. In secret, Zacchaeus' heart was like a storm. On the one hand, he was plagued by the terrible things he had done. On the other hand, he was plagued by the terrible distance from God and, on top of that, by 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, there is only the accusing conscience. Both one's own evil and the evil of others grows ever greater in the dark chamber of the heart. And all the wealth in the world can never calm this heart. What happens in such a heart is what the Bible calls sin. And sin means exactly what happened to Zacchaeus. Namely, loneliness and abandonment...also abandonment by God. It seems to me that sin needs the hiddenness of the heart in order to really get out of hand. In secret, man can not only hide evil. The same thing can also get bigger and bigger. That is a very dangerous thing. The well-known Persian poet Maulana Rumi writes: "An evil thought starts as an ant and becomes a dragon when it grows up." The fact that people hide their sins in their hearts and that it gets worse and worse as a result is nothing new. It was the same with Adam and Eve. After their sin, they had to hide their sin with a fig leaf. And not long after, we see that this sin led to the fratricide of their children Cain and Abel. So sin that grows in secret can be quite dangerous. ...Zacchaeus is just another example of how this happens to all of us humans. I think we all know it in one way or another. Someone says a bad word to you. And the word stays in your heart. You can't free yourself from it. And you feel the hurt and anger. Even hatred. That is not a good feeling. And the feeling does not bring good fruit either. But the story of Zacchaeus is a story with a surprise. Because Zacchaeus was to be called out of his old routine. He was to experience a surprise that would make him jump out of his socks.

The story of Zacchaeus changed the moment Jesus saw Zacchaeus... Actually, Jesus was just passing through. A large crowd of people were around him. It is hard to imagine that Jesus could see little Zacchaeus in his hiding place and even recognize him. No one but Jesus can do that. His eyes fell on the man who was barely visible. Jesus saw Zacchaeus. And Zacchaeus saw Jesus. Jesus looked deep into Zacchaeus' heart. And recognized Zacchaeus as he was. There is a whole world in this word "see"! When 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 penetrate all the walls that Zacchaeus had built around his heart. Jesus saw Zacchaeus not only as he was as a sinner, but he saw him as he always wanted him to be. Jesus could not only see the evil, but could also see the child! A child who should be as God had always wanted him to be. A child that God wanted to be proud of. A Zacchaeus! A righteous man! Do you want to be seen by God? Do you feel lost in the great history of the world? Or do you feel depressed and overwhelmed by many evil thoughts and experiences? Have people done evil to you and you cannot 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 is the case, you can know that God sees you. With Psalm 139 you can pray: "You search me and know me, whether I sit or stand, you know me. You know my thoughts from afar." God is completely with you and he not only sees you as you are, but he also sees you as he wants you to be. When Jesus came to the mulberry tree where Zacchaeus was sitting, he not only saw him, but he left everything behind and gave Zacchaeus all his attention. And he said:

"Zacchaeus, get down quickly;..."

And then everything happened very quickly. Zacchaeus, who previously had to hide in the tree, suddenly appeared and stood exactly where Jesus was. What a picture! On one side stood Jesus, who had never committed a sin, and on the other side stood Zacchaeus, the famous criminal! It is a picture that many could not bear and were frightened by. "Look at that! He sits and eats with sinners and tax collectors!" is what the Pharisees said. Later they mocked the fact that Jesus hung on the cross next to murderers. Yes, exactly! Jesus never avoided sinners. Instead, he sought them out and was close to them. He sought them out because he wanted to save them. That is why he came to us humans. When Jesus still speaks to us humans today, that is all he wants. He wants to restore the community between God and us lost people. That is why we never need to be ashamed to be near Jesus. We also never need to hide from Jesus. On the contrary! Especially when we stand before him with all our weakness and all our sins, he embraces us and takes us in... Anyone who wants to continue to hide in their tree or behind some other thing can of course do that too. But then they stay with themselves and stay with their sin... That is why Jesus calls out to Zacchaeus: Hurry up! Get down from the tree where you are hiding immediately. Not only can you! You can also be with this Jesus who understands you so well and can heal you! Jesus wants us all to come down from our various trees where we have hidden ourselves. And Jesus is looking for us! No path is too far for him!

The day Zacchaeus came down from his tree, his life changed radically. Jesus not only spoke to Zacchaeus, but went into his house and lived 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 the fact that he had done evil to other people. Not only that. Zacchaeus also made good all the things he had done wrong. He paid off the debt and paid people back more than he had to. Now, if that isn't something quite unusual. But the 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 was free! It means that God has come into the house. We can get a little of this joy from the story of Zacchaeus. Oh, how desperately we need this freedom! Oh, how desperately we need peace! Oh, how desperately we need Jesus! And the peace that transcends all human understanding may keep and guard your hearts in Christ Jesus -Amen.