

Generosity

by Miriam Ryan

If you grew up in Sunday school, the name Zacchaeus might cause you to burst out into song, “Zacchaeus was a wee little man, and a wee little man was he...” I’ve since learned that no man likes to be described as “wee.” It seems that poor Zacchaeus had a few things going against him. On top of this, he was a tax collector, which made him one of the most despised people around. Tax collectors were essentially known to the other Jews as traitors because they worked for the Romans (the empire who ruled over them), as they skimmed money off the backs of their own people.

But an encounter with Jesus changed everything for Zacchaeus. He went from cheating others to generously giving away his possessions and paying back those whom he had wronged.

Jesus does two things in this encounter: 1) he sees Zacchaeus 2) he invites himself over for dinner. I don’t know about you, but if Jesus told me he was coming over to my house without advanced notice, I think my first reaction might be panic. I wish I were the type of housekeeper where people could drop by anytime unannounced, but pretty sure if anyone stopped by, they would find a few dirty dishes and stray socks lying around the house (as much as I nag my kids to pick them up)! But Zacchaeus’ reaction is not panic, but rather delight. You see, there was great significance in being willing to enter someone’s home and eat with them. The Jews had rules around which type of people you were allowed to dine with (sinners were not on the list). Therefore, Jesus’ self-invitation symbolized a radical acceptance and love for Zacchaeus, an acceptance that his soul was desperately needing. And the encounter completely changed him, it broke his heart open wide, and his purse strings went with it.

Friends, each of us is seen and loved by Jesus in the same way. It doesn’t matter what you’ve done, your social status, how many people like you, what your imperfections are, or what you look like. Jesus says he wants to come over for dinner and spend time with you. Sounds like he might even overlook my dirty dishes and stray socks too.

Luke 9:1-10

⁹ Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ² A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³ He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

⁵ When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” ⁶ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

⁷ All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.”

⁸ 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.”

⁹ Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Questions for Discussion

1. What stood out to you, encouraged you, or challenged you from this past Sunday's sermon?
2. As you reflect on the story of Zacchaeus what details resonate with you?
3. What makes you feel “seen” by others? What makes you feel “seen” by the Lord?
4. What do you learn about Jesus' heart in this passage (see verse 10)?
5. When have you seen or experienced the radical acceptance of Jesus that led to transformation?
6. Where do you struggle to give or experience this radical acceptance?
7. Why do you think we must first be touched by an experience of grace to be truly generous?
8. What is an area of your life where you would like to grow in generosity?
9. In light of this story, what next step might you take to cultivate more generosity in your life?