

Gospel Reflections for Sun November 3rd 2019
The story of Zacchaeus ... more than meets the eye!

[Luke 19: 1-10](#)

Well folks, here is the **second opinion** as promised a few weeks back when reflecting on the 'healing of the ten lepers'. This story (another acted parable), comes complete with the usual almost expected twist ... but first some cultural perspectives.

I particularly want to acknowledge the insights gained from Ken Bailey's book '*Jesus through Middle Eastern eyes*'. Bailey says that almost certainly Jesus has ignored the hospitality that the town leaders would have prepared for Him when they heard He was passing through. Bailey is confident about this, through what he knows about Jewish culture, including some very specific information about the sycamore tree being a highly invasive plant not unlike the Morton Bay fig tree that many of us would be familiar with. As such it was forbidden by law to grow these trees within the immediate town precinct. So instead of attending the officially organized luncheon, Jesus snubs the local event and invites Himself to the house of a tax collector! Note that in the opening verse of the reading it says: '*Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through.*' Just to be clear, it certainly would not have been the done thing to pass through in the fashion suggested by Bailey.

That sets the scene for the story of Zacchaeus. A few observations ...

1. Zacchaeus is a tax collector (spiritually written off and hated by the Jews).
2. Zacchaeus had a very keen interest in seeing this Jesus fellow and risks his life in the process. (Bailey points out that tax collectors did not usually go near the crowds, as it gave opportunity for someone to literally stick a knife in their back.)
3. Jesus was aware of what was going on with Zacchaeus (who had risked his life to be there and counter-culturally, clambered up a tree for a view.)
4. Jesus engages with Zacchaeus and invites Himself to Zacchaeus's house. (Definitely not the done thing for anyone to even talk to a tax collector, leave alone going to their house. They were socially isolated.)
5. The church people were not happy and grumbling as usual.
6. Zacchaeus responds and also offers a half-baked apology for his actions.
7. Jesus speaks the words '**today salvation has come to this house**'.

There is some conjecture amongst the commentators about the salvation statement in verse 9. While on the one hand it could simply refer to Jesus coming to Zacchaeus's house, the more popular view is that it is referring to Zacchaeus being saved. It also fits perfectly with the themes that have been running through Luke all along.

So here is another acted parable with similar "ingredients" to those of the '*healing of the ten lepers*':

- We have another outcast in the tax collector (in the eyes of the Pharisees at least)
- We have a simple confession of Jesus as Lord*
- Salvation is proclaimed (to someone written off by the Jews)
- Jesus reinforces His teaching point that the kingdom is available for all

Now not only a Samaritan getting into heaven, but a tax collector! What next!

* The confession from Zacchaeus, (albeit rather thin) ... *Yes I know who you are Jesus; I want to see you;* When Jesus invites Zacchaeus into His presence (to come down from the tree), Zacchaeus '*came down at once and welcomed Him gladly*', (or in another translation ... '*Zacchaeus hurried down and welcomed Him with joy.*') Zacchaeus in effect says *Yes, I confess that Jesus is Lord.*

This again profoundly reiterates that under the new covenant, God requires us simply to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and Master. Classic Luther really ... saved by the totally undeserved grace of God, who through His unconditional love for us under this new plan, has simply asked us to place our trust and faith in Jesus.

Perhaps this is a reminder that we have not quite taken hold of the significance of the new covenant, (the new deal) as it was originally intended. In fact, if Jesus was to make another ministry appearance today, He would probably be getting stuck into us Christian people and our churches for the way we have constructed a hybrid blend of *old deal* practices to complicate the true Gospel message. For example, instead of continuing to ask for forgiveness, shouldn't we be celebrating and thanking God that we have already **been forgiven**? (See [Hebrews 8](#).)

We as leaders in Lutheran schools, are called and challenged to make sure that we keep it simple. We who have answered the call to come down to street level to welcome Jesus and receive Him into our lives, can celebrate the fact that salvation has already come to our house! Let's party!

Has main-stream Christianity kept the Gospel that simple? As we celebrate another anniversary of the Reformation this week, are we again in need of some reform? Do we have some marsh-land to reclaim?

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