



October 30<sup>th</sup>

## ***THE NEW SHOFAR***

*Once again Jesus warns against judging another person as being unworthy, even those we may believe deserve it.*

### **We Christians can be the ones who stumble at the teachings of Jesus**

Our reflections should keep in mind there are two accepted ways of reading this parable. The first is to look at Zacchaeus's reflections on what his life would be like after his meeting with Jesus. It is a typical biblical yarn about repentance and forgiveness. Alternatively, we could read it in the light of the Zacchaeus Jesus meets on the side of the road.

The parable is set at the time Jesus is nearing the end of his journey to Jerusalem. As he passes through Jericho he encounters a man named Zacchaeus who is not just a tax collector but a chief tax collector which means, as Luke's Gospel explains, that he is rich. When Jesus arrives at the place where Zacchaeus has perched himself in a tree, he calls him down and invites himself to Zacchaeus' home. This brings Jesus into conflict with the crowd which is scandalised by him going to the house of a notorious sinner. At the same time he brings Zacchaeus joy.

### ***Looking, bringing our baggage and being on the margins***

Among the various details in this story told only by Luke, three stand out, particularly in relation to passages that have come just before this one. First, *sight* is again critical. Earlier, it is the tenth leper's recognition that he has been healed that causes him to alter his course (17:15). In the passage immediately before this one (omitted by the lectionary), a blind man receives sight and, in response, follows Jesus and glorifies God. Now, Zacchaeus desires to *see* Jesus, but even as he is trying to catch a glimpse of this prophet Jesus looks up, calls him down, and honours him by coming to stay at his home.

A second significant detail is *wealth*. Luke, more than any other evangelist, is consistently concerned about matters of wealth and, correspondingly, treatment of the poor. In the previous chapter a rich man, when asked to give away all he had, departs Jesus in sadness. When Jesus declares that it is nearly impossible for the rich to enter the kingdom of God, the disciples —like most Jews of their time believe wealth to be a sign of God's favour — are disbelieving. In contrast, in this story another rich man receives Jesus with joy and gives (or promises to give) half of his wealth to the poor and restores (or promises to restore) fourfold any amount he may

have defrauded, and Jesus announces that the impossible has now happened as “salvation has come to this house” (19:9).

*Finally*, Zacchaeus is short, not just in physical stature, but also in terms of his moral standing among his neighbours. They despise him and hence they are angered when Jesus invites himself to Zacchaeus’ home. This is not the first time bystanders have been outraged by Jesus’ behaviour. Think of Simon’s reaction that Jesus would allow a woman all know to have a poor reputation to wash his feet with her tears (7:39). Then there was the reaction of the Pharisees to the sinners and tax collectors who love to listen to Jesus (15:1-2). Nor is this the first time tax collectors have figured prominently in Jesus’ ministry. And, at the opening of the previous chapter, it is the penitent tax collector, not the righteous Pharisee, who returns home justified (17:14). This parable picks up a number of Jesus’ teachings.

### **It is all about what Jesus does when he looks at Zachaeus**

Notice that Zacchaeus neither confesses his sin nor repents. He does commit to a future radical change in the way he lives and acts among God’s people. And this could be seen as a sign of repentance. However, in other parables there are verbal confessions of guilt - for instance, of the tax collector at the Temple (18:13). Nor does Jesus commend Zacchaeus’ penitence, or his faith, or his change of heart. He merely pronounces blessing, blessing based not on anything Zacchaeus has done but simply because he, like those grumbling around him, is an Israelite, a son of Abraham. Further, Zacchaeus does not offer his financial disclosure in response to anything Jesus has said; rather, it falls on the heels of the grumbling of the crowd. Perhaps it is a response to Jesus’ presence, but perhaps it is his bewilderment at the crowd’s complaint or a defence of his reputation. In either case, I suspect that Zacchaeus is not turning over a new leaf as much as he is lifting up an old one for all to see.

### ***The marginalised wealthy Zachaeus too is loved by God***

From the outset of Luke’s gospel and throughout its narrative, Jesus sides with those on the margin, those considered down and out, those not accounted as much in the eyes of the world. This parable continues with that same message. Ostracise anyone and God picks them up and invites them to come and make their home in Him. While Zacchaeus is rich, he is nevertheless despised by his neighbours, counted as nothing, even as worse than nothing. Yet Jesus singles him out. Why wouldn’t he? God has a special love for those the world rejects. By seeing him, calling him, staying with him, and blessing him, Jesus declares for all to hear that this one, even this chief tax collector, is a child of Abraham...and child of God. Perhaps Jesus is again at work seeking out those who are lost (whether through their own actions or those around them) in order to find, save, and restore them. Zacchaeus does not have to do anything more than *look* for Jesus.

