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Luke 19:1–10

## CONDENSED PERSONALITY

We were always told that the story of Zacchaeus was a story of conversion. In Chapter 18, Jesus encounters a different rich man who refuses Jesus' offer of a conversion and it says Jesus "departs in sadness." Clearly these two stories are linked, or maybe the two very different stories from Chapters 18 and 19 are linked like a chain to Chapter 17, where the penitent tax collector goes home justified, not the righteous Pharisee.

We know tax collectors were seen as pawns of an occupying army—traitors, at worst; corrupt officials, at best. Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The same is true for us, isn't it? How often do we have the opportunity to influence a group in a positive way, only to sit silently. Or, how often do we jump on the impossibility band wagon—woe is me—when we hit a bump in the road.

Following Jesus means our influence and our willingness to risk our influence will be called upon for God's kingdom from time to time. Repentance is a matter of the heart and a matter of our current choices. If our choices do not match our spiritual surrender to Jesus, then salvation is impossible. That is what Jesus said in Chapter 18:25, "Easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God's kingdom." Then he says in verse 27, "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God."

Jesus and Zacchaeus are looking out for each other. They trust each other the way we are called to trust one another—to be priests to one another. "The Priesthood of believers"—that's the stuff of the Reformation, not doing away with the essential role (function) of priests, but seeing that important function as essential for every believer. Do priests get to grumble? Do priests get to shirk their responsibility? Are priests allowed to amass huge amounts of personal wealth without any response to God? Can priests live one way and talk one way at church and another way away from church?

Jesus sees Zacchaeus as a colleague and calls him by name, and stays with him long enough to create a bond—a personal relationship—and Jesus pronounces a blessing on his house and his family. This should not come as a surprise because Jesus does exactly the same thing for us. He sees us as we really are, calls us by name, offers us time in his presence, and blesses us and our families.

How often our spiritual response to Jesus is what is different from the Zacchaeus story. Jesus defended Zacchaeus, and Zacchaeus defends Jesus reputation in return. When the crowd grumbles, Zacchaeus stands up and discloses his financial position—his finances are made public!

Everything about this story seems impossible.

- A tax collector wants to see Jesus
- Jesus wants to stay in his home.
- The tax collector is actually very generous and righteous.
- Jesus declares not just Zacchaeus, but his whole household is saved.

If we are willing to see Zacchaeus in a new way, maybe we will be able to see Jesus in a new way. We might even see our willingness to be a supportive, positive, generous part of Bush Hill Presbyterian Church in a new way. Being in the presence of Christ makes the impossible a possibility. Being in the presence of Christ makes us loyal to his body, the church, and to one another. Being in the presence of Christ makes us happy. Being in the presence of Christ makes us generous!

In the case of Zacchaeus, four times more generous than others would be expected and five times more generous than the law of Moses was required! Not simply repay dollar for dollar but four times that amount—not 10 percent, but 50 percent.

Could you live on 50 percent of what you are currently making? Maybe the better question isn't can we emulate Zacchaeus, but can we—do we—relate our forgiveness to our current gratitude? Look back at Chapter 7, verse 47b: "But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little."

Matters of the wallet are about love. If we are careful to remember how much God has forgiven us, we will love with greater generosity. Not just here—but, it starts here!

Amen.