

Sermon- Our Saviors Lutheran Church - November 18th, 2018

Text- Luke 19:1-10

Little Big Man

Grace and Peace to you and from our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. I titled this exercise in a homily, "Little Big Man", which I will get to in a moment. The Gospel today describes an encounter with Jesus and a man by the name of Zacchaeus, who is described as being short in stature. History and current events describe many people as short in stature. Napoleon comes to mind. Many US Senators are short in stature. Tom Cruise is very short. (I always ponder how ridiculous it is that he plays Jack Reacher in the Lee Childs books made into movies. After all Jack Reacher is 6 ft. 5 inches - but that's Hollywood). Kenny Baker is 3ft 8 inches tall - who is he? He is R2 D2 in Star Wars. Dolly Parton says she is 5 ft tall but that's a stretch. Charlotte Bronte who wrote 'Jane Eyre' was 4ft 10 inches. Point is that you don't have to be tall to do big things in our world.

But being short has its difficulties. You might have noticed that I am tall and my wife, Cathy, is short. At least three times a day I hear the question, "Can you get that down for me, hon?" Top shelf of the kitchen cabinets - a severe challenge. Or the numerous times we have been in the Big Apple watching the Macy's Day Thanksgiving Day parade. About a million people - the rows 15-20 deep. No way Cathy can see. I assume a linebacker pose and plow through the crowd with Cathy right behind me, creating a wedge so that she can get in the front. Crowd not happy but at least she can see.

Back to the Gospel. As I just read, we have an account of Zacchaeus. Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him.

First, the line about Jesus passing through. Where was Jesus going? Glad that you asked. He was going to Jerusalem. He was going for the Passover. He was going to die for you and me. Pretty important first line.

Then the text describes Zacchaeus as a “chief” tax collector. None of us here probably enjoys paying taxes, but in the culture of Jesus’ time, tax collectors had a terrible reputation. For one thing, they were employed by the enemy, the hated Roman occupying force. Kind of like the Quislings in Norway. Beyond that, tax collectors had a fairly deserved reputation for being dishonest, for overcharging, for skimming money off the top to line their own pockets. Being a tax collector was bad enough, but, Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector. He was the top dog, the head honcho, the big kahuna, the man in charge. He was like a mafia boss, loan shark, and extortionist all rolled into one.

So we have a funny scene with Zacchaeus running as fast as his little legs would carry him, with his fancy robes flying and climbing a tree so that he could get close to Jesus. Why? Because Zacchaeus needed Metanoia. A change in his life, a conversion. Needed something different.

The rest of the story might be what we expect. After all, this is Jesus. He yells up to Zacchaeus and says they need to get together and talk about things. That’s what Jesus does. For Zacchaeus and us.

So what’s it all about Alfie? What does this mean for you and me. We might be up in a tree laden with guilt or shame. Something we did years ago or yesterday. Or our life is spiraling out of control with anger, or addictions, we are out on a limb, hanging on for dear life. We have been there, for many of us we are there. And we are desperately trying to see and find Jesus.

Do you know what Jesus said to Zacchaeus when they got to his house? Of course you don’t, because they didn’t have tape recorders. But I can guess! Here is what he said to Zacchaeus and to us who are out on a limb.

You are forgiven. You are a child of God who God loves immensely. Because you are forgiven, you have the possibility of change. (Zacchaeus did and so can we.) I am going to Jerusalem to die for your sins. Zacchaeus and us. When you want to see me, look in the faces of the poor, the disenfranchised, the lonely, the sick. For I will be there.

Feeling up in a tree? Out on a limb? Just look to Jesus. He told the Little Big Man ‘let’s chat and get together.’

And he says the same thing to you and me.

Amen- Let it be so.