

Sermon for November 2, 2025 - 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 19:1-10 (EHV)

Theme: The Seeking Saviour...

- 1) Stirs a desire in our hearts to learn about Him.
- 2) Calls us to receive Him.
- 3) Changes our lives.

*Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. <sup>2</sup>A man named Zacchaeus was there. He was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. <sup>3</sup>He was trying to see who Jesus was, but since he was short, he could not see because of the crowd. <sup>4</sup>He ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Jesus, because he was about to pass by that way. <sup>5</sup>When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” <sup>6</sup>He came down quickly and welcomed Jesus joyfully. <sup>7</sup>When the people saw it, they were all grumbling because he went to be a guest of a sinful man.*

*<sup>8</sup>Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord, I am going to give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anyone out of anything, I will pay back four times as much.”*

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

Have you ever longed to find meaning for your life but didn't know where to look? You're not alone. Many people feel this way.

The world encourages us to find purpose by pursuing wealth, leisure, and earthly things. Can such things calm our troubled hearts? Like a drug, they temporarily numb the pains we feel in life, but they can never give us true, lasting peace.

Only the LORD can fulfil our hearts' longing, as St. Augustine once prayed: “Thou hast formed us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee.”

God often uses feelings of restlessness, guilt and the fear of death to prompt people to seek Him. Why? So He can find and save them. Let us explore how the LORD did this for a man named Zacchaeus, under the theme: **The Seeking Saviour**. . . 1) Stirs a desire in our hearts to learn about Him. 2) Calls us to receive Him. 3) Changes our lives.

Part One: The seeking Saviour stirs a desire in our hearts to learn about Him.

*<sup>1</sup> Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through.*

Our sermon text takes place during Jesus' last journey to Jerusalem before His crucifixion. He intentionally passed through Jericho to offer His forgiving peace to a specific restless soul.

<sup>2</sup>*A man named Zacchaeus was there. He was a chief tax collector, and he was rich.*

Let me take a moment to explain who tax collectors were. Instead of entrusting the responsibility of tax collecting to a government agency like the CRA, Rome privatized it by selling the right to collect taxes to wealthy groups or individuals. As long as Rome got its money and exorbitant rates did not cause riots, these entrepreneurs were allowed to charge people whatever they wanted to cover their costs and make a profit. This practice led to many tax collectors taking advantage of the people, which is why the Jews considered them traitors.

Zacchaeus was a “chief” tax collector, well known in Jericho, who either managed or employed other tax collectors under him. I envision him as a shrewd businessman who enjoyed making money, believing that it would bring him fulfilment.

Aren't we tempted to view money similarly? Yes, even if we're not wealthy businesspeople, the world still tempts us to approach life like Zacchaeus: focused on our quality of life above all else. We believe that more money, experiences, and possessions will fill the void we feel in our hearts, so we pursue these things with all gusto.

Does attaining such goals bring us lasting fulfilment? They didn't for Zacchaeus. A restlessness stirred inside him that his wealth could not calm. Earlier in life, he didn't care about his relationship with the LORD, but now, as he got older, he began to wonder: “What will happen to me when I die?” Could he, who lived his life in selfish extravagance, ever hope for salvation?”

Most rabbis taught that being a tax collector made you irredeemable – doomed to hell forever. But Zacchaeus heard rumours of a new rabbi who performed mighty miracles: a rabbi who was not ashamed to eat with sinners and even accepted a former tax-collector as His disciple.<sup>i</sup> Rumours swirled that this rabbi might be the Messiah.

The Holy Spirit used the news Zacchaeus heard about Jesus to awaken in him the desire to see Him. Why? Because God takes no pleasure in the death of anyone. He wants all people to repent and live.<sup>ii</sup> Therefore, when Zacchaeus heard that Jesus was passing through Jericho...

<sup>3</sup>*He was trying to see who Jesus was, but since he was short, he could not see because of the crowd. <sup>4</sup>He ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Jesus, because he was about to pass by that way.*

No respectable Jewish man would run or climb a tree in public. Such actions were considered childish. But Zacchaeus' desire to see Jesus ran so deep that he didn't care what people thought of him. He dropped his work, wealth, and even his dignity just to catch a glimpse of Jesus.

Oh, that we would be like Zacchaeus – willing to drop everything to see Jesus! Sadly, how often don't we do the opposite: allowing other things to steal us away from Him? Every Sunday, Jesus comes to our church to meet with us through Word and Sacrament. Sadly, how often don't we let other “more pressing” needs like sports, convenience, or comfort get in the way of coming to

worship? How often don't we hide our faith in public, afraid of what people might think if they knew what we believed?

Yes, we can learn a lot from the actions of this little tax collector. Nothing is more important than seeing Jesus. May the LORD stir in our hearts the same desire He stirred in Zacchaeus to learn more about Him – heeding His call to receive Him.

Part Two: The seeking Saviour calls us to receive Him.

*<sup>5</sup>When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.”*

Just think: not only was Zacchaeus looking for Jesus, but Jesus was searching for him – calling him by name with urgency.

Jesus knew more about Zacchaeus than Zacchaeus knew about himself. He knew that Zacchaeus loved money so much that he sacrificed his faith to become a tax collector and hurt his own countrymen by extorting money from them. Jesus knew it all, yet He said He needed to stay at Zacchaeus' house!

Didn't Jesus know that by staying at Zacchaeus' house, the Pharisees would consider Him unclean? Didn't Jesus know that the people would think poorly of Him for associating Himself with such a prominent tax collector? Yes, Jesus knew all this; nevertheless, He said that He *must* stay at Zacchaeus' house!

*<sup>6</sup>He came down quickly and welcomed Jesus joyfully.*

Jesus' command convinced Zacchaeus that He was the promised Messiah – awakening a repentant faith in his heart to receive Jesus as his Lord and Saviour from sin. Oh, how happy this made Zacchaeus. All was not lost: God was reconciling himself to Zacchaeus in Jesus, not counting his sins against him.<sup>iii</sup>

Brothers and sisters in Christ: the Saviour who found Zacchaeus found us too. He knows each of us individually and invites us to receive Him. How? Through repentance and faith! Yes, your dear Saviour wants to dwell with you – making His home in your heart. He knows all about your sins and past unfaithfulness, yet He is willing to forgive all. He is your Saviour, who loves you dearly. In Him, your heart finds rest.

Every week, Jesus seeks you out, wanting to spend time with you as you meditate on His Word. How do you answer His call: joyfully and quickly like Zacchaeus? Or do you ignore His call because you have more important things to do?

Sadly, just as a long-time married couple might take each other's love for granted, forgetting how empty their life was before they met, so we are tempted to do the same with Christ.

How important it is, therefore, to take time to examine your life in the light of God's law – reflecting upon your sins and repenting of them. Why? Because the more you acknowledge your need for God's grace, the more you will want to spend time with Jesus, basking in the Gospel of His forgiving love – a love that changes your life.

Part Three: The seeking Saviour changes our lives.

*<sup>7</sup>When the people saw it, they were all grumbling because he went to be a guest of a sinful man.*

Was Zacchaeus sinful? Absolutely. But what the people failed to understand is that Jesus didn't come to save the righteous. He came to save sinners – calling them to repentance and faith.<sup>iv</sup> That is why he was not ashamed to be Zacchaeus' guest. This is also why he is not ashamed to dwell with you and me.

*<sup>8</sup>Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I am going to give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anyone out of anything, I will pay back four times as much."*

Understand that Zacchaeus is not making empty promises to make himself look good. No, Zacchaeus' heart was changed. He no longer wanted worldly pursuits to rule his heart. Why? Because he recognized what the apostle Paul would later confess:

*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," of whom I am the worst. But I was shown mercy for this reason: that in me, the worst sinner, Christ Jesus might demonstrate his unlimited patience as an example for those who are going to believe in him, resulting in eternal life.<sup>v</sup>*

Because Jesus' love for him was so overwhelming, Zacchaeus couldn't help but respond.<sup>vi</sup> He chose to use the wealth with which the LORD blessed him to serve other people instead of himself.<sup>vii</sup>

*<sup>9</sup>Jesus said to him, "Today, salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup>For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*

Jesus affirms Zacchaeus' repentance as genuine. The Jewish religious leaders condemned Zacchaeus as an irredeemable sinner. Jesus, however, pronounced Zacchaeus to be Abraham's son and heir of salvation.

The unbelieving Jews falsely believed their biological descent from Abraham made them acceptable to God.<sup>viii</sup> Jesus warned them that it didn't.<sup>ix</sup> Faith in the Messiah for the forgiveness of sin is what makes you Abraham's heir in God's sight,<sup>x</sup> as the Scriptures say:

*Understand, then, that those who believe are the children of Abraham... those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.<sup>xi</sup>*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the same Jesus who mercifully sought Zacchaeus – rescuing him from his empty way of life - seeks us out too. How? First, by using His law to stir in our hearts a restlessness over our sins and purpose in life. Then He calls out to us through His Gospel, revealing His forgiving love that we might repent and believe in Him. Through this Gospel, the Holy Spirit awakens faith in our hearts and changes us. No longer do we want to live selfishly; instead, we want to live in a way that honours Christ, reflecting His saving love to the world. We begin to care for our neighbours as Christ cared for us, wanting to use our wealth to help support the Gospel and bring relief to those in need.

This doesn't mean that we won't still have to struggle against our sinful flesh until the day we die. We will. But with Christ, we can overcome our selfish desires with His forgiving love. The Gospel changes us, moving us to want to do good by putting His glory and the welfare of others ahead of our own.<sup>xii</sup>

Jesus, your seeking Saviour, found you and fills your restless heart with the peace of His forgiving presence. Live in the joy of this truth. Your life has true meaning through faith in Christ. God is your forgiving Father, Jesus your brother, and heaven your home. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Cf. Matthew 9:9-13

<sup>ii</sup> Cf. Ezekiel 18:32

<sup>iii</sup> Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:19

<sup>iv</sup> Cf. Luke 5:31-32

<sup>v</sup> 1 Timothy 1:15,16 EHV

<sup>vi</sup> Cf 1 John 4:7-21

<sup>vii</sup> Cf. Ephesians 4:28, Luke 16:1-14

<sup>viii</sup> Cf. Matthew 3:9 and John 8:39

<sup>ix</sup> Cf. Luke 13:28

<sup>x</sup> Cf. Romans 4

<sup>xi</sup> Galatians 3:7,9 EHV

<sup>xii</sup> Cf. Romans 7:14-8:17