

I am going to start this morning by referring to a text which is probably familiar to all of us and which occurs shortly before the Gospel reading we just heard. Before he went south to Jericho, Jesus was as usual teaching and healing, when a “ruler” asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus told him to sell everything he had and give to the poor but the ruler was very sad at this response since he was a wealthy man. Which led Jesus to say that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Everyone asked who then can be saved? and Jesus responded “What is impossible with humans is possible with God.” In other words, God can do miracles in people’s lives.

And a few verses on, such a miracle occurs, in the life of Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was a tax collector. He worked for the occupying Romans. There was no easy way to know exactly how much tax you owed; no 1040s, no tax tables and so it was easy for the tax collectors to line their own pockets and become wealthy men. Wealthy but universally unpopular.

No-one is going to help Zacchaeus get to the front of the crowd so he climbs a tree to get a better view of Jesus and as a result, Jesus gets a better view of him.

It was Zacchaeus who climbed the tree so he could see Jesus but Jesus who says “the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost,” as though he was looking for Zacchaeus. In the spiritual life there is a phenomenon which can best be expressed as mutual seeking. We are looking for God and God is looking for us. As we seek to draw closer to the divine we realize that our action, our metaphorically climbing the tree, was actually prompted by God’s movement towards us. But we get to use our free will in making the move. We get to turn towards God.

If Zacchaeus had not climbed the tree would Jesus have noticed him? We don’t know, but we do know that Jesus did not heal everyone, Jesus did not go to everyone’s home. As a human he was unable to see

everyone in the way that the Holy Spirit, unhampered by humanness is able to do. The Holy Spirit is always seeking out and saving the lost, and let's face it, most of us feel pretty lost at one time or another. But we have to be willing to be found.

Which reminds me of the teaching story in which a man perishes in a terrible flood. He gets to heaven and says to God, "I prayed and prayed but you didn't save me." And God replies, "I sent two boats and a helicopter, you just had to get in."

But I digress. Back to Zacchaeus.

This must have been an astonishing moment for Zacchaeus. He comes face to face, eye to eye with the Savior of the world. A moment in which he finds himself totally seen, totally known and totally loved. And in that is the miracle.

Because in that meeting of his soul with the Christ, he is transformed. The rich man passes through the eye of a needle and finds an entirely new way of being. And that is manifest in Jesus coming to his house and being welcomed.

As we seek God and find ourselves sought by God, the next step is to open our homes to God. And of course we are talking in metaphors here so our homes are not our physical houses but the homes in which we live – every area of our minds, bodies, souls and psyches. Yes, there are going to be places that we would rather God didn't see, doors we don't want to open, dark corners that we are ashamed of. For most of us, welcoming Jesus the Christ to our homes is an ongoing, even a lifetime practice. As we grow in trust and we are willing to let Jesus move from the very pleasant living room the places that we do not love we find that God's presence transforms them with compassionate love.

And the result of this miraculous transformation in Zacchaeus' life is that he gives away his riches. He gives half of his possessions to the poor and makes reparations for the money he has stolen. His response to

meeting Jesus and having him come into his home is to do what the ruler in the previous chapter was unwilling to do. Give away his money.

That's hard to do.

It's hard because we are all scared that we won't have enough. We are concerned that if we give away what we have there won't be enough tomorrow.

I find it interesting that Zacchaeus only volunteered to give away half his possessions. We are not all called to be monastics and embrace poverty. Giving away half his possessions was enough.

This is perhaps the third movement in the soul's journey; we seek and are sought by God, we open our homes, our hearts and lives to the sanctifying presence of the Holy Spirit, and then we give in response to God's self-giving love for us. We give of ourselves and we give of what we have, trusting that we are being cared for, trusting that there will be enough to go around.

Because in the reign of God what we give enriches the one to whom we give and then comes back to enrich us.

Today, my friends, we are among the richest people in the world. We are rich spiritually and we are rich materially. We throw away more food than others can only imagine having. There are people starving today.

Our experience of God's love calls us to give selflessly and with compassion. I encourage you to consider your own riches and ask how you can live more simply so that even in these times of rising prices you can still give generously to the ministry and mission of St Benedict's and also to the needs of the world.

Zacchaeus was a short man, but his story is huge. Despised by the people but loved by God. (There's a whole other sermon there.) He sought and found God in Jesus, was transformed and let go of his addiction to accumulating money, instead choosing to give to those in

need. We don't hear that people liked him much better afterwards. We don't hear that he stopped being a tax collector. But we hear that he was brought into the family of God, becoming a true son of Abraham.

This all happened very rapidly, like a time-lapse film speeded up. For us the process is slower. But when we meet God, welcome God into our homes and then live generous and compassionate lives, we know that whatever salvation really means, we have found it and we too are the spiritual descendants of Abraham and Sarah.