

Jesus' Bad Manners Luke 19:1-10

Loving God, still our minds and quiet our worries; open our ears and hearts so that we might truly hear your Word. Amen.

I. Introduction

A. Familiar story

- **Read Luke 19:1-10:** He entered Jericho and was passing through it. ²A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax-collector and was rich. ³He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. ⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. ⁵When 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.' ⁶So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. ⁷All who saw it began to grumble and said, 'He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.' ⁸Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, 'Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.' ⁹Then Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.'
- Professor at Columbia Theological Seminary assigned first-year students this passage for their first sermon
 - Self-contained and not too complicated
 - Seminary supplied a lot of the pulpits for small churches in the area
 - Students would go on Sunday and preach in places that couldn't afford a pastor
 - One day seminary gets a letter from one of those congregations
 - Thanked the seminary for sending the students
 - Appreciated them so much
 - However, they asked, could they preach some other text than Zacchaeus??

- One of the first stories many of us learn
 - Bet you can still remember the ditty we learned in Vacation Bible School
 - Zacchaeus was a wee little man, a wee little man was he...

B. Well-loved story that presents a picture of God's grace

- Grace may not be the first word you use when you think of Zacchaeus, but it's there
- Probably one of the reasons we love this story is the picture of God's grace it gives us

II. Jesus and Zacchaeus

A. Story occurs in the final stages of Jesus' journey from the Galilee to Jerusalem

- After the Transfiguration, Jesus begins his journey to Jerusalem from Galilee
- Luke tells us in 9:51, "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem."
- The rest of Luke's gospel is the story of that journey and the events that occur in Jerusalem
- Now, Jesus' journey is nearly complete
- But first Jesus makes a stop in Jericho
 - It's not that much farther to Jerusalem
 - But Jesus has a mission in Jericho – Zacchaeus

B. Who is Zacchaeus?

- The first thing the text tells us is that Zacchaeus is a chief tax collector and rich
 - The two descriptions are not unrelated
 - As a tax collector, Zacchaeus was automatically labeled a collaborator with the occupier
 - Added to that is how Romans collected taxes
 - Used "private contractors" whose salary was to keep a part of what they collected

- As long as the Romans got what they expected, they didn't keep tabs on what the collector made
- Abuse was a foregone conclusion
- Tax collectors extorted as much as they could and grew rich in the process
- Hated for that and because they collaborated with the occupiers
 - Being a tax collector was synonymous with being a sinner and a sinner of major proportions
- The next thing the text tells us is that Zacchaeus is a short man
 - There was a large crowd gathered to see Jesus pass by and because Zacchaeus was short, he couldn't see
 - Over the years, folks have tried to make something of Zacchaeus' stature
 - Psychoanalyzing what being short means
 - I don't think Luke was trying to do that
 - He wanted to explain why a grown man was up a sycamore tree to see Jesus – he was too short to see over the crowd
 - BTW, the sycamore is still there in Jericho and I can see why Zacchaeus picked that tree

C. Jesus and Zacchaeus

- When Jesus comes to the sycamore, he stops, looks up and calls to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down for I must stay at your house today."
 - First, isn't it interesting that Jesus knew Zacchaeus' name??
 - How?
 - Second, note the urgency in Jesus' words
 - Hurry and come down
 - Stay with you today
 - The day of salvation has arrived for Zacchaeus

- Third, did you notice that Jesus didn't show very good manners?
 - I can hear my mama's voice if I invited myself over to someone's house that I knew, let alone a stranger!
 - The direction of hospitality here is reversed with the guest issuing the invitation, not the host

D. The crowd

- One other actor in this drama – the crowd
- The crowd is there to see Jesus too and they play an active role in this story
- First, they prevent Zacchaeus from seeing Jesus, driving him to the tree
 - Not necessarily an accident
 - Visualize Zacchaeus trying to see over them
 - Not out of line of human behavior to think that not only did the crowd not make way for him but they actively block him
 - He is a sinner and what does he have to do with this prophet anyway?
- Second, they grumble when Jesus invites himself to Zacchaeus' house
 - Doesn't Jesus know who he's eating with?
 - This man is a sinner, a great sinner, a traitor to his people
 - Isn't Jesus a prophet?
 - Why is he treating Zacchaeus so nice?

III. Grace at work

A. Here we have God's grace at work

- The crowd is right about Zacchaeus – he is a sinner
- But Jesus came for just such as Zacchaeus and he has no problem dining with him
 - In fact, Jesus' invitation comes before Zacchaeus says a word

- This encounter is the gift that Zacchaeus has been waiting for, what drew him to see Jesus so urgently
- And he responds
 - I've always thought that the sequence of the story from Jesus' calling out to Zacchaeus went something like this
 - Zacchaeus jumps down from the tree and runs home, alerting everyone that the great Rabbi is on his way
 - Jesus, meanwhile, follows behind with the disciples and the rest of the crowd kind of wandering along too to see what was going to happen
 - Jesus arrives at Zacchaeus and has a meal
 - After the meal, Zacchaeus jumps up and makes his repentant speech
 - Zacchaeus responds only after the meal, or so I always thought
 - However, in reading commentaries about this story in preparation for this sermon, another possibility came out
 - Zacchaeus' response to Jesus saying he's coming to dine is not located specifically
 - What I mean is Luke has Zacchaeus speak his repentance immediately after noting the crowd's grumbling that Jesus was going to eat with this great sinner
 - He doesn't tell us that Zacchaeus and Jesus have eaten
 - In fact, he seems to imply otherwise
 - Zacchaeus' response to Jesus' grace is immediate and very public, right there in front of all those ungracious folk who have just judged him
 - There and then, not later, Zacchaeus pledges half his possessions to the poor and promises to pay back any he has defrauded most generously
 - And Jesus proclaims that salvation has come to him and he is a son of Abraham
 - In front of the crowd

- Effectively restoring him to the community
- B. John Wesley called this kind of grace “prevenient grace,” or the grace that comes before (pre – before and venient – come)
- All the same grace
 - Analogy of cakes and different occasions
 - Same cake, but different if we call it a birthday cake vs. a wedding cake
 - In prevenient grace, God reaches out to us even before we know God or God’s love
 - Just as Jesus reached out to Zacchaeus
 - In prevenient grace, God invites us into a closer relationship
 - Just as Jesus invited himself to dinner at Zacchaeus’ house, calling him by name
 - And in prevenient grace, God begins the healing of our sin-sickness
 - Just as Zacchaeus’ healing is seen with his repentance and reparations
 - And notice the direction of prevenient grace, flowing from God to us
 - Jesus comes to Zacchaeus
 - Jesus doesn’t invite Zacchaeus to the synagogue but comes to his home, meets him where he lives, literally
 - That’s prevenient grace in action
 - God comes to us and meets us where we are

III. Conclusion

- A. Have you ever been up a tree? Out on a limb?
- Have you ever been like Zacchaeus?
 - Like Zacchaeus, we are isolated by our sin
 - Hoping for a glimpse of Jesus
 - Afraid he won’t want a glimpse of us

- B. Jesus comes looking for us too
- He seeks us out when we think we are seeking him
 - He goes out of his way to find us
 - He calls us by name
 - And he shows shockingly bad manners by inviting himself over and into our lives
- C. Zacchaeus' story is a story of God's gift of grace
- It is a story of grace that reaches out to help one who cannot help himself
 - It is a story we need to hear because we are Zacchaeus and Jesus still reaches out to help us, who cannot help ourselves

Let us pray.

God, thank you for reaching out to help us when we could not help ourselves. Thank you for inviting yourself into our lives and reshaping us. Jesus, help us to be like you and go out of our way to meet people where they are and show them your grace in action. Amen.

Let us pray:

Ever-present and faithful God, how often we are neither present nor faithful. We find it hard to be in your presence, for we are reminded of our unworthiness. We find it difficult to be faithful, for the claims of the world are strong. But on this day, we are here to worship in spite of our neediness, for you are worthy of our praise, even if we feel unworthy to offer it; and as for us, we are in need of your grace, and you in your mercy, are eager to give it. For this we utter our praise and thanksgiving as we gather to worship your matchless name. Amen.