



MINISTER
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31st Sunday in Ordinary Time
November 4, 2007- All Saints Sunday

Luke 19:1-10

Salvation Has Come

Intro: Our New testament lesson is from Luke. It is the story of Zacchaeus. Curiously, the name Zacchaeus means pure and innocent and yet no one thinks of him like that, because he is the chief tax collector. Listen how Jesus encounters him and insists that they be in a relationship. Hear these words.

Today we celebrate All Saints Day, a day when we remember with thanksgiving members and friends and family in the faith who lived the Christian life and have now completed their baptism. Our tradition and our experience declare that each one of us is a potential saint. We are given our halo on the day of our baptism. Last week we baptized Hailey, and we remembered again how in baptism we are spiritually bound into Christ. And, because of our baptism, all the grace we need to be "saintly" has been planted within our soul. Baptism provides a new identity, it makes us people of journey and people of pilgrimage. Baptism makes a lifelong claim on us and it changes us. Yet we are free to choose how to respond to the good news that we are loved as God's very own.

Zacchaeus isn't baptized in our reading this morning, but his life is forever changed, he starts a new journey, in one moment as Jesus declares him to be a son of Abraham.

As our story begins, Jesus is passing through town and Zacchaeus wanted to see and hear what was going on so he climbs up a tree. Now, Zacchaeus had more than one reason to be up a tree. It was not simply that he was short in stature. He was short in a number of other ways. He was a despised collaborator with Rome, a tax collector. He was very good at getting rich at other's expense. Luke tells us he was wealthy. There is nothing wrong with honest wealth. It is wealth at others expense that brings God's judgment. Zacchaeus was up a tree not only to see Jesus, but because it afforded the added protection of being beyond the reach of this despising crowd.

We know this story, we know what happens. Jesus spots him, calls him down out of his perch and announces, "I must stay at your house today." Zacchaeus scrambles down—"happily" we are told—and the two of them head off to the tax collector's house.

As they do, the crowd begins to grumble, "He's gone off with a sinner!" But in the moment between Jesus' question and Zacchaeus' response, a miracle takes place. The collaborator becomes a contributor, the betrayer becomes a benefactor, a sinner becomes one of the saints. "Look Lord," says Zacchaeus, "a half of my possessions I will give to the poor." "And if I have defrauded anyone," he continues, "I will repay them four times over." Suddenly, Zac has got it! He's living by faith. God's vision of justice and mercy has not only arrived in the life of one sinner, but also in the lives of all touched by his life. In that encounter the crooked has gone straight, the false has turned true, the foolhardy opportunist has become a faithful steward. The poor will be fed and clothed, and those who were denied justice under the law, will now reap justice with a triple dividend. Salvation has come to this house.

What happened between Jesus' "hurry down Zacchaeus, I must stay at your house today," and the tiny tax collector's obedient and happy scramble out of that tree to take Jesus home with him? What always happens when you and I welcome the transforming presence of Jesus Christ into our lives. He comes, sits down at a sinner's table and changes begin. The man who had lived by his own wits, caring for no one but himself and for his own agenda, begins living by the agenda of faith. He has begun trusting not himself, but God in all circumstances, in the conviction and hope that God does what is right by God's world, and God does what is right by God's people when you and I live by such faith—when we live in such faithfulness..

On this All Saints Day we will read the names of members who died in the last year. Each of them people were shaped by faith. They were an active part of our ministry for years. —Some of them most of spent their lifetimes here at Community. We remember and give thanks to God for their lives and their passions in faith. They found something, that one thing of value beyond all else in following Christ. We find that as well when we seek to follow.

As we look back in history. About one hundred years ago, the Presbyterian Church adopted a statement of its vision for ministry in our denomination. It is a statement of faithful following. They called it "The Great Ends of the Church." It's brief, but it speaks volumes. The great ends of the church are the proclamation of the Gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the proclamation of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world. In a nutshell that is what we are about, that is what makes CPC different from Rotary, Kiwanis or the YMCA.

This historic statement still reflects our life and commitments at Community Presbyterian. The final phrase of that vision statement has particular relevance for mission at CPC: "the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world."

The realm of God is not something you and I are to construct. It already exists. Our task is to exhibit it, to show it with our lives. God is at work; we are called to join in. Zacchaeus understood that in his time.

Mission is the church participating in God's activity in the world. The first question to ask in developing a vision for mission in the church is not what we should do, but what God is doing in the world. The best place to discover that is in the pages of the Gospel, in stories like the one we heard today about Zacchaeus.

What Jesus is up to in the gospel is what God is up to in the world. The biblical story gives mission its meaning, the story of this God who longs for us to love and serve and transform the world. Zacchaeus learned one afternoon that following Jesus demands sacrifice and commitment. He also learned that there is great joy in giving yourself over to the vision of a world where God's justice is made real. It was his salvation.

Jesus is looking us in the eye and calling us by name saying, "hurry down, I must stay at your house today." Will we scramble down and entrust our life—all of it, personal, political, economic and spiritual—to the faithfulness of God revealed in Jesus Christ? Will we sit down at table with him? When we do so and we will know what it means for salvation to come to our house.

A standard part of a memorial service is a prayer where I invite people to lift up a favorite memory of particular gifts or values of the deceased and lift up those up to God in thanksgiving. I often conclude this prayer with words about the witness of the saint who has now entered the kingdom. And then, I ask God to empower each of us to let go—and then to go forth into new life, to honor the dead by living energetic lives that embody the values and commitments so dear to the one who has departed.

We are surrounded by names of those who have been shaped by faith and helped to shape the history of this congregation. The best way to honor the past is to embrace the future with all the vision and faithfulness and courage that the past represents. This is how our God remains a Living God. This is how we persevere in our own budding sainthood. This is how the church will remain as vital for our children and grandchildren as it has been for us. Amen.