



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

"For the Son of man is come to find and seek out and save the lost."

I speak to you today as a sinner to sinners, as the beloved of God to God's beloved, as one called to bear witness to those called to bear witness. Amen. Please be seated.

I want to take a risk today. I'm not going to tell a story or a joke. I'm not going to try to capture your attention. I want to begin with the art that I've picked for today because I picked this art out about two weeks ago and it begins to help me to say what I want to say today. It's on your bulletin and it's from the Stammheim Missal, which was composed sometime between 1160 and 1170-ish in Germany. It was done by a priest. This missal was used by the choir and the priests to help them get through the entire service of the mass.

And this image is from Luke, Chapter 18, which is where we are today. It is this snapshot, an illuminated manuscript of Jesus looking up at Zacchaeus and saying in Latin, because of course we know Jesus spoke Latin - Him saying in Latin, Zacchaeus, come down from that tree. And that was seen as a kind of picture that the reader of that text would use to help inscribe in their hearts and souls the message of today's gospel. Yes, that is a picture, but really the purpose of those illuminated manuscripts was to actually be a kind of mirror, a kind of way in which you could see yourself not only through reading, but right alongside almost in the space between the words, you can see the figure of Christ come to life before you.

And as you'll see in that picture that I've picked, and I could have picked any image, you see depictions of Jesus and Zacchaeus starting in the second century of the Christian faith. It happens on a sarcophagus that we have recovered, which is unbelievable. But this one I have found particularly powerful because of that mirroring effect, as well as those little beautiful circles and that organic connection that is placed between Jesus, His words, and Zacchaeus. And those beautiful colored lines, those curves, those almost organic moves that are made by the calligrapher, these are meant to encourage us when we see that mirror of today's gospel to see how our lives can be such that they are somehow shaped by the image of Christ meeting Zacchaeus .

Because the relationship that we have with God through Jesus Christ is not a kind of relationship of a transaction. As we read today in our readings from the

Hebrew Bible, God does not need sacrifice. God does not need to be fed. God is not hungry. And if God was hungry, He wouldn't tell you. But God seeks relationship and that relationship with Jesus is primary for Zacchaeus .

And what's even more powerful about this image is the kind of optics that you see in the text. Zacchaeus wants to see Jesus, but more importantly, Zacchaeus wants to be seen by Jesus, which is why he's willing to risk everything. By this I mean that what you see in Zacchaeus is a fundamental picture of who you and I are before Christ. God knows and sees us at our best and on our best day, when we are our best selves. And God also sees us when we are at our worst, when we are our worst selves.

You and I have a tendency when we don't have that God's-eye-view to fall prey to one or the other, and that has only become more prevalent in modern communications. We either see ourselves as our best selves, and when we see ourselves as our best selves, we enjoy judging others. And so we get online and we find the kind of echo chamber of the people who agree with us, usually on Meta or Facebook, and we confirm their analysis and say, yep, and uh-huh. And we find people who will help us enter into this special place of judgment and righteousness.

Or we get online and we are obsessed by the comparisons which make us feel less than. And we suddenly start to judge ourselves because we're not as smart or as pretty or as successful, or we don't have the number of friends or the number of likes as someone else does. And we fall into shame and we feel small because we don't measure up. And there is a part of human life that is constructed in such a way that we are almost encouraged day by day to see ourselves in one of those two extremes. Not in the middle, not as the whole, but in those two extremes.

But God has seen us as our best selves, and God has seen us as our worst selves. And the key to living the Christian life is to delegate that side of ourselves over to God, to let God see us as the whole selves that we are, to know us on our best days, and to know us on our worst days. God sees us and when we allow God to see us, when we allow God's vision, the merciful gaze of Jesus to be at the core of our identity, we find redemption.

And that is what Zacchaeus does. Zacchaeus was a tax collector, and as many of you might know because you've listened to sermons about this before, tax collectors were people who would collect the taxes from the populace, they'd give it to the emperor and they'd skim off the profit. And the tax rate in the holy land during Jesus' time sat at about 50%. And so they were despised. As agents of the government, you couldn't kill them easily, and they were people that were seen as dishonorable and dishonest, as people that were less than.

And not only that, but Zacchaeus is also short. The scripture says short in stature. What a nice way to say it. And in that time period as today, we tend to draw some weird connections between people's heights and their legitimacy, their value. So Zacchaeus was short. And finally, Zacchaeus was shameless. He wasn't someone who went into the temple and beat his breast like the publican we read about last week in the same chapter from Luke. But Zacchaeus was utterly shameless. He was willing to run ahead. He was willing to not behave like anybody else.

And keep in mind when Zacchaeus climbed that tree, he was actually exposing himself because back in the day, folks, not that I want to get too anatomically clinically correct here, but back in the day, people did not wear Hanes underwear. They wore gowns, right? And so that's when you hear in the scriptures, gird up your loins. It means take the gown you're wearing and kind of tuck it up because you need to keep yourself protected because we're going to battle.

So Zacchaeus climbs up the tree, which means that everybody can look up that tree and look up his cloak and see just what he's made of. And this was something in Jesus' time period that you didn't even show your wife, except on Fridays. It was a source of shame to expose yourself. But Zacchaeus is shameless. He's climbing the tree because he wants to see Jesus. And more importantly, he wants to be seen by Jesus. And Zacchaeus, which might be a kind of odd kind of saint for us, Zacchaeus has become the kind of hero of the Christian faith. As I said just recently, you could find so many images of Zacchaeus in his tree in the early Christian art because he was unashamed. He knew himself as a tax collector, and yet he wants to see Jesus. And the wonder of the gospel is that Jesus sees him.

So there are three things I want you to see today in this scripture because it's key to us understanding what we've been talking about for the past couple of weeks, which is about the space for grace that we need to create here at Christ Church Cranbrook, that we need to cultivate here at Christ Church Cranbrook, that we need to continue to somehow create among us so that we can continue to be exactly who we've been for so many years, except newer and transformed by God day by day, greater and greater.

And Pastor Manisha gave an incredible sermon about the space for grace beyond us when we work in the community. And that work has continued even since she mentioned what we did last month. And Father Chris gave a great, wonderful sermon on the space for grace between us when he talked about the welcome that people have when they come here and join our community.

But the apex of this space for grace is the space for grace within. Whatever else we might be as a church, whatever else we might do, for the things that we might try to be, for the service we would provide, for the cultural programs we would put on, for all the teaching we can give you. If you miss that space for grace within, you have not followed and found your way to the heart of this gospel and to this church.

And that space for grace begins with sight. God sees us on our best days and our worst days, and in order to see ourselves truly, we have to delegate and give over that sight that we think we have of ourselves to God, to see in that meeting between Jesus and Zacchaeus our own story of being seen by Jesus and loved.

The second thing I want you to see is there is this incredible movement. There's a kind of kinetics of grace that happens in this incredible piece of scripture because Zacchaeus comes down and welcomes Jesus. And yes, the crowd was astounded that a sinner hosted Jesus. And this is because ironically, in the Gospel of Luke, it's always the Pharisees that are welcoming Jesus. Isn't that ironic? They usually tend to be the people Jesus loves to hate, but it's always the Pharisees who are welcoming Jesus in Luke, except for this moment when it is Zacchaeus, a sinner. And this puts us into that movement that Jesus has come to meet Zacchaeus where he is and to transform his life by His presence there.

And Zacchaeus, having received the gift of Christ's presence, is suddenly transformed and suddenly goes with the grain of God's generosity in his life, that merciful gaze of Jesus, which becomes, as we read today in our collect, the gift that is given to us, which we did not deserve or earn, that gift of Jesus to us comes into the house of our lives. And Zacchaeus then experiences transformation and liberation. He gives away half of what he has, which seems like a tall order, and he restores to anybody he has defrauded four times of what he has taken. Zacchaeus is transformed.

There is a kind of movement to the space for grace within us. It doesn't simply sit in our lives like a ticket we can use. It's not a way of appeasing our way to God and somehow doing some kind of high act of sacrifice that God says, wow, you really are good. No Zacchaeus is transformed and he can live no other way, given the Christ who has come to him. And that movement needs to be ours as well. We have to move through grace in which we experience ourselves, as I try to say to remind myself every time I preach. as a sinner among sinners, as the beloved among God's beloved, and as those called to bear witness among those called to bear witness. To witness to God in our lives means more than just giving lip service to God. It's taking a risk in our lives to go with the grain of that generosity shown to us.

And the final thing I want you to see in this, having spoken a bit about the vision, having spoken a bit about the movement, and the gift of Christ is friendship. The Gospel of Luke has an incredible centering on friendship with Christ. It's addressed to Theophilus, the friend of God. And at the end in Luke there is this peculiar moment where Pilate and Herod, when Jesus is being brought to His death, they trade Jesus back and forth. They had been previously at odds with each other and engaged in some kind of ridiculous political battle because all political battles are, at their core, ridiculous.

And Jesus gets sent back and forth between them, bound from the back, bloody from being scourged, and they become friends. The Gospel of Luke says that day, by trading Jesus back and forth, they become friends. And this is a kind of warped mirror of what happens today between Zacchaeus and Jesus. Jesus and Zacchaeus become friends. The powerful thing about living with Jesus and creating space within us, this is not a solitary moment. This is not where we become still and on our own. When we create space within us, we create space for friendship with God, the God who has created us to be with us. The God who knows us on our best days and our worst days. The God who has traveled into our lives and has found us hanging on a tree is willing to hang on a tree for us. That god seeks friendship. And friendship is not just a relationship of advantage. Friendship is not just a relationship of having a couple of yuck-yucks. Friendship is ultimately someone who has come to love you and to make more of you.

Over the past week, one of my oldest friends came to visit me at Christ Church Cranbrook for three days. Rob Wright, the bishop of Atlanta. One of us has had a successful career. One of us has had an interesting career. Rob is Bishop of Atlanta and has always been a kind of big brother to me. It was a title I claimed initially, and it's a title that he has owned. And he walked with me over the course of a challenging week, and I gave thanks to God for my friend. It made all the difference in the world.

Christ seeks friendship with me. Wonder of wonders. Christ seeks friendship with you. Wonder of wonders. Christ has come so that you would know yourselves as he sees you, so that you would have the gift of His presence in your life. And so you would develop a kind of friendship in which you are transformed by His love and grace.

Let that be the image that drives you today. May you be transformed by this gospel. May you know yourself and can understand and see and celebrate with Jesus that today salvation has come to this house.

Amen.