

Dorset South & West Circuit. Written Service.
Sunday November 2nd. All Souls Sunday
Zacchaeus was.... **Prepared by Revd Jean Quick.**



Call to Worship. Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found; surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. Psalm 32:7

STF 443

Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,
tender and true;
out of the heart of the Father above,
streaming to me and to you:
wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;
why do they roam?
Love only waits to forgive and forget;
home, weary wanderer, home!
Wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell,
joyfully came;
came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,
sharing their sorrow and shame;
seeking the lost,
saving, redeeming at measureless cost.

Come to my heart, O thou wonderful love,
come and abide,
lifting my life, till it rises above
envy and falsehood and pride;
seeking to be
lowly and humble, a learner of thee.

Prayers of adoration and confession: (From the Lutheran church of Australia)

Come, let us worship the God who came to seek and save the lost!

Let us worship the God who came to seek and save each of us!

Let us welcome God into our homes and our hearts.

Let us give of ourselves in this time of worship that we may know God.

Let us joyfully and with gratitude worship God!

How patient is God! We run around trying to do everything our way, and God just waits. We try to buy life and happiness, and God waits. We hurt others and walk away from those in need, and God waits. God waits, and upon hearing our heartfelt prayers and cries for help, God touches us with forgiveness and new life.

We pray to the One who waits to hear—from us!

Surrounded by so many seductions, Patient God, we find it difficult to see you in our lives. Justice has a hard time surviving when there is so much persecution and affliction towards the innocent of the world.

Our neighbourhoods, our families, even our churches, are filled with strife and contention.

We cry for help, Listening God; forgive us! As we wait for your grace to fill our lives, may we open our hearts to your hope and healing, always giving thanks for Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

We keep a moment of Silence.

Assurance of Pardon

Rich, poor; young, old; sinner, saint: We are all God's children, and God transforms each of us into the people we are meant to be. Broken, we are mended; separated from others, we are made one; longing to serve, we are sent forth. Thanks be to God, we are forgiven. **Amen.**

Bible reading. Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Reflection

Whenever I read this passage of scripture from Luke's gospel a childhood song comes flooding back into my head. Do you know it? "Now Zacchaeus was a very little man and a very little man was he. He climbed up

into the sycamore tree for the Saviour he wanted to see...” maybe the actions we did to accompany the song are there in our memories too? It’s a happy jolly little song. The story has a happy ending but there’s a lot of angst in the story. Tax collectors were known for their corruption and dishonesty and Zacchaeus seems to be one of them. His stature means he can’t easily see over the crowds. He desperately wants to see what is happening and to see Jesus. When Jesus spots him the crowd turns nasty.

The psalmist in our call to worship speaks about God being our hiding place. We are told Zacchaeus climbed into the sycamore tree so that he could see Jesus. It strikes me that a sycamore tree in full leaf might be a good hiding place too. We assume that Zacchaeus would not be very popular among the crowd. Revered perhaps because of his status as not just a tax collector but a Chief tax collector. Doesn’t it seem odd that such a public figure would lower himself to climb up a tree? Just imagine if say King Charles III came to a park in your neighbourhood and the local MP decided to climb up a tree for a better view? Outrageous and it would never happen. I wonder what drove Zacchaeus up that tree? Why was he desperate to see Jesus? It is out of the ordinary to see a well-dressed, well-educated, high-profile, wealthy man in broad daylight, climbing a tree, and crawling out on a limb. What made him throw embarrassment, shame, and ridicule to the wind, to do something as uncharacteristic as climbing a tree for all to see?

Let’s think about Zacchaeus and his encounter with Jesus and what insights it has to inspire our own faith.

We could say: **Zacchaeus was at the ‘top of the tree’** in his profession. Not just a tax collector but a Chief tax collector. We tend to focus on his corrupt practices and although we know tax collectors in the time of Christ were thought to be corrupt, Zacchaeus actually owns up to his crimes. However to be made a Chief tax collector he must have had some good things about him. So much so that the Roman Government trusted and rewarded him with more seniority. We know he was wealthy and we can only surmise from his later confession and offer to repay what was owed to others, that his wealth came from corruption. He had two ‘strikes’ against him by his fellow countrymen. Jewish tax collectors like Zacchaeus were scorned by their countrymen for a couple of reasons: one, they were known for cheating the taxpayers; and, two, they worked for Rome. The other Jews saw Jewish tax collectors as collaborators with the enemy—traitors to their own people. The phrase “at the top of the tree” comes into its own in the story of Zacchaeus. We see him perched at the top of the tree in every way – powerful, abundantly wealthy, and isolated on the perch to which he had scrambled, shoved as he was to the outskirts of the crowd who would make no place to let him in. How would you have felt seeing this revered but frightful figure trying to get through the crowd and choosing to climb up a tree for a better view? I have been in many a crowd waiting to see a famous person. In my younger days I would ‘Royal watch’ and go along to see the pop star hero’s of the day. The crowd being excited and jubilantly expectant would make way for those who were smaller to come to the front and be able to see. The crowd would have known who Zacchaeus was but despite his personal needs and his status in society they would not let him through to get a good view. That’s sad, despite his occupation you would have thought that they would have taken into consideration his own personal difficulties. I would have been afraid that he might have fallen from the tree. We have another saying, ‘how the mighty have fallen’. It could have been a literal experience and I wonder if anyone in the crowd would have cared? It’s sad to think that some of the famous people I queued up to get a glimpse of, are now in the category of that phrase “how the mighty..”. Royalty and pop idols have been exposed for their misdemeanour’s. Being ‘at the top of the tree’, doesn’t protect you from temptation and we seem to be harder on those, who we deem to have privileged lives. What do you really think about Zacchaeus? I imagine that he was lonely, isolated and still at the margins of society despite his success. It’s hard enough to have any kind of condition that makes you seem different from others. Zacchaeus may have felt he had turned things around by becoming wealthy and successful. Yet he was still despised and marginalised.

So Zacchaeus goes out on a limb: He took a risk. A risk for his safety in climbing the tree. A risk about what such an action might do for his reputation as a senior official both in the eyes of the community and his employers. A risk about what Jesus’ reaction might be. I don’t think I have ever climbed a tree. I have always been a cautious person and I would be concerned that the limb I climbed out onto might snap. However I have been ‘out on a limb’ in a metaphorical sense on many occasions. Risking what I knew as safe and secure. Comfortable and known for a new experience or way of being. I am sure we have all been there. Life has directed us in different directions and it’s been scary at times but we had to take the risk. However are we willing to go out on a limb to meet Jesus? Jesus went out on a limb to speak to Zacchaeus. When you think of the physicality of the situation. Zacchaeus was up high in the tree looking down on Jesus as he passed by below. Jesus had to stop in his tracks and despite knowing the crowd’s reaction he took a risk and went out on a limb to look up to Zacchaeus. The roles are almost reversed. The one who is revered looks up to the one the crowd despises. Zacchaeus is looking down at Jesus but his heart’s desire is to look up to Jesus’ way of thinking. Why would Jesus go out on a limb and take such a risk? John 10:14 tells us that Jesus says, “I know my sheep and my sheep know me”. Numerous verses in the Bible assure us that God knows us and our hearts desire. Psalm 139 and Jeremiah 1:5 both tell us that God knew us even before we were born and where still in our Mothers womb. When a woman is expecting we might chat about what the child might become. We have our hopes and dreams for the child to develop and become something wonderful in life. It would be an anathema to say the child will probably have some defect and grow up to be a corrupt crook! God knew what Zacchaeus’ life would be like before he was born and yet Jesus singled him out in the crowd for special caring attention. Jesus could have been rebuffed or ignored. He took a risk as he always does on

our behalf and no more so than when his arms were spread out on the cross of Calvary. When he died for our transgressions. And yet so many still reject His ways. Who might be the person you would not want to cross your path? Would you be willing to go out on a limb for them? Maybe there has been some 'past history' that keeps them away and from you wanting to associate with them? Jesus said to Zacchaeus, in the song version, "I'm coming to your house for tea". Is there someone Jesus is challenging us to go out on a limb for and show them the same forgiveness and acceptance that Christ offered to the hated tax collector? Christmas is coming and opportunities could abound.

Zacchaeus certainly learns a new way of being : Jesus doesn't have to tell him what meeting him will mean. Zacchaeus knows from just one look that life will be incredibly different. Can you imagine the same scenario. You're wealthy beyond all your dreams and meeting Jesus makes you want to give up most of what you once held as dear? Of course that doesn't have to be in a monetary sense. However if we do the maths and Zacchaeus must have been good with the figures. He is going to give away half his wealth to the poor. There are some very charitable people who seem to give generously but are equally quite concerned about how it will affect their tax, which rather muddies the whole idea of charity. Zacchaeus does not offer half his wealth with strings attached. He goes on, he promises to repay anyone he has cheated four times the amount that he wrongly took. So Zacchaeus is going to reduce his wealth by 50%, then pay back 4 x what he wrongfully took. So if we divide his 50% by 4 he is going to be left with a very small amount of money. Before we get too tied up in the financial aspect. This isn't about wealth or money, it's about a new way of being. It's not even about the generosity. It's about a change of heart and a new sense of purpose. If you were to walk through this story were would you place yourself? It might be in a different place or person depending upon what you're going through. One day in the crowd, another day up a tree, and another standing in 'Jesus' shoes', offering to stand alongside someone who for whatever reasons is marginalised. Some folks can seem so hard hearted or perpetually bitter and angry. Or just numb and depressed and beyond all help. Nothing short of a miracle can change that person's heart. Luke 4:18 tells us that Jesus came to set such people free. "to set the oppressed free". What more can we possibly do? What's the riskiest thing you can do that will cost nothing and could have a momentous effect? Give someone a smile. There have been many poems written about giving someone a smile. I like this one, as you read it think about the faces in our bible passage today: who gave and who needed a smile. What effect did it have and what could we change with just one simple but risky and costly action?

The Value of a Smile

A smile costs nothing, but creates much.

*It enriches those who receive without
impoverishing those who give.*

*It happens in a flash and the memory of it lasts
forever.*

*None are so rich that they can get along without it,
and none are so poor; but are richer for a smile.*

*Yet it cannot be bought, begged, borrowed or
stolen, for it is something that is no earthly good to
anybody, 'til it is given away.*

*And if it ever happens that some people should be
too tired to give you a smile, why not leave one of
yours?*

*For nobody needs a smile so much as those who
have none left to give. Anon.*

STF 255

The kingdom of God
is justice and joy,
for Jesus restores
what sin would destroy;
God's power and glory
in Jesus we know,
and here and hereafter
the kingdom shall grow.

The kingdom of God
is mercy and grace,
the prisoners are freed,
the sinners find place,
the outcast are welcomed
God's banquet to share,
and hope is awakened
in place of despair.

The kingdom of God
is challenge and choice,
believe the good news,
repent and rejoice!
His love for us sinners
brought Christ to his cross,
our crisis of judgement
for gain or for loss.

God's kingdom is come,
the gift and the goal,
in Jesus begun,
in heaven made whole;
the heirs of the kingdom
shall answer his call,
and all things cry glory
to God all in all!

Prayers of Intercession Today is also marked as All Souls Day our prayers come from the Lutheran Church of Australia.

God has raised Jesus Christ to sit at his right hand. Let us therefore pray to our Father in heaven through his Son for all the world and all the saints.

O God, Heavenly Father: we thank you today for calling us your saints. In spite of our unholy lives you look at us and see Jesus' perfect life and death covering ours. Thank you for this grace, the grace we received when we were baptised. Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer**

Thank you for every Christian who has helped us on our journey and encouraged us to keep believing when we felt like giving up. Thank you for all those who taught us the faith. Thank you for those who made the ultimate sacrifice of their lives to ensure others could hear of your love in Christ. Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer**

We remember the saints in heaven. Thank you for releasing them from the burden of sin and death in this life and for keeping your promise to them. We especially remember those from our community who have passed away in the past year (*insert names here*). Give comfort to all those who grieve over loved ones no longer with us on earth. Give them the hope only your word can offer us. Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer**

We pray for your church on earth, that it may remain faithful to the apostles' teaching and that it will strive for unity. We pray for all Christians, especially those under persecution, that they may imitate the martyrs in bold witness to the gospel.

We pray for those who are not yet part of your church and for those who have left it, asking your spirit to convince them of your love for them in Jesus. And we pray for the enemies of the church, and those who curse your saints. Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer**

Bring peace to those nations in conflict and where there is political instability. Protect those who are poor and hungry and give them hope. Move those with plenty to share with those who have little. Help all people to love their neighbour as themselves. Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer**

God of life, we give thanks for the love you have shown to the world through all your saints, and we celebrate our continuing communion with them whenever we worship. We look forward to being part of the crowd around your throne in heaven on the last day. In the meantime keep us looking to Jesus and help us to keep giving a clear witness to him, living the holy lives you have called us to live by the power of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus holy name we pray. Amen. Let us pray the Lord's Prayer.

STF 745

For all the saints who from their labours rest,
who thee by faith before the world confessed,
thy name, O Jesus, be for ever blest:
Alleluia, alleluia!

Thou wast their rock, their fortress and their might;
thou, Lord, their captain in the well-fought fight;
thou in the darkness still their one true light:
Alleluia, alleluia!

O may thy soldiers, faithful, true, and bold,
fight as the saints who nobly fought of old,
and win, with them, the victor's crown of gold!
Alleluia, alleluia!

O blest communion, fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;
yet all are one in thee, for all are thine:
Alleluia, alleluia!

And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,
steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
and hearts are brave again, and arms are strong:
Alleluia, alleluia!

The golden evening brightens in the west;
soon, soon to faithful warriors comes their rest;
sweet is the calm of paradise the blest:
Alleluia, alleluia!

But lo, there breaks a yet more glorious day:
the saints triumphant rise in bright array;
the King of Glory passes on his way!
Alleluia, alleluia!

From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,
through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,
singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost:
Alleluia, alleluia!

The Blessing

On this All Souls Sunday: May we go on our way rejoicing; Surrounded as we are by such a great cloud of witnesses, may we take courage as we face each new challenge, and comfort when we pick ourselves up from a fall, In whatever good we choose to do, may we precede it with hope, accompany it with prayer, and follow it with thanksgiving. And The blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us now and ever more. **Amen.**

