



# Bread in Community

Pastor Megan Berry

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“Bread in Community” | Luke 19:1-10 | Pastor Megan Berry

The story of Zaccheus has always been an interesting and perplexing one for me and not just because he makes a good Vacation Bible Camp story, with a song and everything. Zaccheus’s story is an interesting one because he has EVERYTHING right? We read in verse 2 how he’s not only a CHIEF tax collector (one of the highest in the business) but he’s also incredibly rich (probably due to being one of the top folks in his particular vocation). He is the epitome of the American Dream: find a job, climb the corporate ladder to the top, become rich. It seems like he’s done it all, has it all, so why is he so intrigued by Jesus that he’s willing to run ahead and climb a tree in order to see him?

While it makes for a cute little song “Zaccheus was a wee little man and a wee little man was he. So he climbed up in a sycamore tree for the Lord he wanted to see.” We often get to the end of the song “so climb down Zaccheus, for I’m coming to your house tonight!” and focus most of our interpretations and rememberings of this passage around how Jesus chooses the least likely to have meals with, even chief tax collectors.

And in those interpretations we often neglect or completely skip over that Zaccheus knew enough to be intrigued by who Jesus is, and was intrigued enough to do whatever he could do to be able to see Jesus for himself. He didn’t let the crowd stop him and even risked humiliation by climbing a tree to see Jesus.

What could have prompted such behavior? The factual answer is we don’t know why and maybe that’s why folks don’t spend a whole lot of time around these verses of the passage because it’s all speculation, but I think it’s worth some pondering.

Zaccheus is not the only tax collector that Jesus interacts with, in fact several chapters earlier, Levi (another tax collector) was called to be a disciple. Maybe Zaccheus knew Levi and saw him leave this particular lifestyle behind for this Jesus person and so Zaccheus was intrigued to see what could take someone away from this dream of being rich and successful?

Or maybe, despite living the American dream, Zaccheus didn’t actually feel fully fulfilled and happy. There was something tugging at him to find something more, something different, and he’s heard rumblings of this Jesus guy, how he’s gathering disciples and doing something new, something a little different that is supposedly life-changing.

Maybe it was something else... Regardless of his motivation, some internal thought or feeling

moved him such that he was willing to run ahead and climb a tree to see Jesus and get a glimpse of something new, something different that may change his life.

So, before we get to the second point of the sermon, I want to pause for a moment and ask y'all. How are you Zaccheus today? Maybe you feel like things are going really well, but there's something scratching at you, slowly urging you to climb that sycamore tree to see Jesus. Or maybe you already recognize that deep longing, that urgent need to see Jesus, what is it that's spurring you towards Jesus?

We don't know what it was in Zaccheus that moved him to climb that tree and focus on Jesus even though he seemingly had everything, but I do believe we all have a similar urge/motivation inside of us. And it's okay if you're not sure, if you can't quite name it, but I hope you take some time to think about what motivates you or would motivate you to do everything it takes to see Jesus if he were walking the streets of downtown Madison one day.

So now with that little bit of a thought experiment in our brains, I want to focus on the last few verses of this passage and what we might glean from those today.

As we remember from our song, Zaccheus is seeking out Jesus from the tree, and Jesus calls out to him and says "come down, for I am eating at your place tonight." As Zaccheus is climbing his way down, the crowds start grumbling and voicing their opinion about the absurdity of Jesus dining with Zaccheus. And here's where it gets more interesting. Zaccheus is coming towards Jesus and exclaims that half of his possessions he will give to the poor, and he will repay 4 times what he defrauded from others.

While this seems very straightforward in our brains, obviously he found Jesus, realized the mistakes of his life, and is repenting and changing his ways. I'm left to wonder, "was it that easy?" or are there parts missing from the story and maybe there's a different interpretation to be had here?

One such difference of interpretation comes from various Greek translators who don't agree on the tense of the verbs here. Our translation says "look, half of my possessions I WILL GIVE" indicating Zaccheus is making a choice about the future. But some translations say that this verb should actually be present tense "look, half of my possessions, I DO GIVE" showing that Zaccheus for some reason already recognizes the need to give back part of his abundance.

Maybe that is one reason why he's seeking out Jesus? His particular profession makes him hated because of the stereotypes and his colleagues don't want to build relationships with him because he's giving back to others and possibly making them feel bad or guilty? How lonely must it be to be cast aside from two seemingly opposed communities?

If we look back at the future tense translation, that Zaccheus is now declaring that he will give back and help those around him, change his ways because he's seen Jesus, while seemingly easy, when poked at a little bit, might not be so easy.

In this future-tense translation, there is a connection between feeling that urge to see Jesus, to do whatever it takes to lay eyes on him, and then an action or reaction to seeing him. A transformation is had and that is cause for action. For Zaccheus his action to the transformation of seeing Jesus is the offer to give back, to try to undo some of the harm he has done to others and not do that harm again.

It makes me wonder what our action or reaction to transformation might be? That feels like a really big question, so feel free to continue to ponder that especially for yourself, but I'm going to narrow us down a bit here.

Following Zaccheus' lead in our scripture, how are we sharing our over-abundance of resources? Our personal over-abundance or our collective over-abundance?

This question feels a little silly to ask and I struggled all weekend trying to come up with something different because overall, I feel like we share a lot at Covenant and we don't do so lightly, but looking at our scripture and the world around us, it might be worth revisiting this question.

From the year and a half that I've worked here, I've been in awe of how much Covenant as a whole cares about building relationships with folks and using what we have for the good of others. I don't know if y'all have looked around, but we have a BIG building, and this building is well loved not only by us but by others as well. There are constantly folks in and out of this building for various reasons and yes, some groups do pay to use our building, but others don't and we view that as a mission, as an opportunity to help others out of the abundance of what we have.

The mission committee this year is focusing on doing what we can to help end systemic poverty in Madison, so many of us buy extra food and share what we have so others don't go hungry.

We have shared ministries, like hosting Vacation Bible Camp with Bethany United Methodist. Every summer, the location flip flops so we each get to host it and share resources, not only physical resources like beads for friendship bracelets, but volunteer resources as well.

There's many more highlights I could hit, but I just wanted to name a few to get our brains activated. Are we happy with our sharing? Are you happy with how you share your resources? Is there something spurring in your souls right now, urging you to seek out Jesus from a sycamore tree and act?

We can't fix all of the world's problems, but we can do our best to continue learning and growing and leading by example as best we can. In a world that wants to hoard everything, how are we continually called to share what we have and help those around us? What is that little nudge in our souls, urging us towards running ahead to see Jesus and be continually transformed? Amen.