

“STEWARDSHIP CONNECTIONS: TREASURE”

Luke 19:1-10; Matthew 6:19-21

October 16, 2022

Rev. Jerry Duggins

The children’s song gets it exactly right:

*Zacchaeus was a wee little man and a wee little man was he,
He climbed up in the sycamore tree, for the Lord he wanted to see.*

What the song doesn’t tell us is that he is rich. We understand why a short man might climb a tree, but why a rich man wouldn’t just use his influence to gain an audience with Jesus remains a mystery. He’s not well-liked in the village. No one steps aside for him, but he runs a “collection agency.” He must have some muscle working for him.

Or perhaps I’m being a little too quick to share in the prejudice directed at Zacchaeus. The First Nations version of this story begins like this: “Creator Set Free (Jesus) was walking through Moon Village (Jericho). There, a man named Pure of Heart (Zacchaeus), who was a head tribal tax collector with many possessions, was trying to see....” This indigenous translation picks up on something we miss in other translations. Native Americans place a high value on the meaning of names as did the Semitic people of Jesus’ day. Luke’s readers would have known that Zacchaeus means innocent or pure.

Now that makes me look at this story completely differently. To use his wealth or position to gain access to Jesus would be out of character. I can see someone whose name means pure in heart climbing a tree without a clue about how ridiculous he looks. I can see him ignoring the whispers about his bad reputation. I can see the implicit bias in the crowd in referring to Pure in Heart as a sinner.

We aren’t ever told that Zacchaeus cheated people in collecting taxes. If he has, he is eager to make that right. But it may be that he thought he came by his money honestly. It may be that he’s a lot like us, totally practical about money. We ask plenty of questions. Do we have enough to achieve the goals we have in mind? Is there enough to retire on? Is it wisely invested? How much should I give away? Where should I give it?

I wonder if Zacchaeus thought much about how he earned his living before meeting Jesus. I sometimes think about my own financial position and the debt I owe to others for my current security: to my dad for paying for my undergraduate degree, the grants and loans for my seminary degree, the free babysitting from Janet’s parents, the better than living wage paid by my current employer. I don’t think I’ve cheated anyone, but people have been more generous to me than perhaps I merit. And this says nothing about the opportunities made available to me because of the schools I attended, the community I lived in, nothing about the advantages I received from race, gender and social class. Thankfulness could easily degenerate into guilt.

The village thought Zacchaeus should feel guilty. They judged him without knowing his heart. But Jesus sees him, against the odds. You know, short man in a crowd, not afraid to look ridiculous in order to see Jesus. Pure in Heart makes a connection with Creator Set Free and everything changes. When Zacchaeus is seen and welcomed by Jesus, a man with a good head for numbers became the man he was intended to be with a heart for generosity.

“Where your heart is, there will your treasure be also.” The Sermon on the Mount puts forward a very challenging ethic. You can serve money or you can serve God. You aren’t expected to give where you have nothing to give. You aren’t expected to be careless with your money, but you can’t make it your top priority and understand the love of God in Christ Jesus.

The question here is whether money will govern your heart or your heart will govern your money. Zacchaeus shows us that it is possible to move toward generosity.

So as you think about your pledge in this stewardship season, we are asking you to think about your treasure. I think Zacchaeus offers good model for doing so. Try to see Jesus and don’t worry about how ridiculous that may end up looking. Don’t worry about the village or the church or the pastor or what your best friend may think. Listen to your heart as you encounter Jesus. Make the connections that bring salvation to your household. Amen.