

Home Service for October 30, 2022

Welcome and Announcements

You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

Stand at your watch post and wait for the Lord. A vision has been promised at the appointed time. It speaks of the end and does not lie. Stand at your watch post and wait.

Call to Worship:

When we need to climb a tree to look for help, Christ proclaims, “I am coming to your house today.” When we feel lost, and have nowhere to turn, Christ assures us, “I am coming to your house today.” Christ is coming. Christ is with us even now. Worship the Lord with joy and praise.

Opening Prayer:

Lord God of love and peace, open our hearts today to receive the invitation of Jesus to come and be present in our lives. Release us from our smallness and create an atmosphere of confession and healing love in our hearts and our spirits. For we ask these things in Jesus’ Name, AMEN.

Prayer of Confession:

Lord of mercy, forgive us when we make excuses for our lack of faith. We let our selfishness and apathy get in the way of illumination and peace. We find ways to duck out of our opportunities for service and witness, claiming that we are too small or too ill-equipped to be effective witnesses to Jesus Christ. How foolish we can be! All of our lives God has been present to us, whether or not we knew it. God’s love is always surrounding us. Yet we have not taken the time to recognize it. We whine and complain about the misfortunes that have befallen us and wonder where God is. We want immediate release from our struggles. And when release comes, we again move off in our own realms of self-centeredness. Help us, O Lord. Stop us from being so faithless. Open our hearts with your forgiving spirits that we, having been healed and forgiven, may actually be effective witnesses to your love and compassion. For we ask this in Jesus’ Name. AMEN.

Words of Assurance

You have always been loved by God. Know that you are healed and forgiven, that God has placed a special blessing in your life. Rejoice! For God is with you. Serve God in all that you say, think, and do. AMEN.

Read Psalm 119:137-144

You are righteous, LORD,
and your laws are right.
¹³⁸ The statutes you have laid down are righteous;
they are fully trustworthy.
¹³⁹ My zeal wears me out,
for my enemies ignore your words.
¹⁴⁰ Your promises have been thoroughly tested,
and your servant loves them.
¹⁴¹ Though I am lowly and despised,
I do not forget your precepts.
¹⁴² Your righteousness is everlasting
and your law is true.
¹⁴³ Trouble and distress have come upon me,
but your commands give me delight.
¹⁴⁴ Your statutes are always righteous;
give me understanding that I may live.

Prayers of the People:

God of trees and pathways, you stand ready for us to gaze in your direction. As Jesus walked down the Jericho path, observing Zacchaeus, help us to remember that you are continually present to us, watching and guiding our steps. When we falter, you pick us up, dust us off, and place us back on the path. When we run in directions that are harmful, you are ready to rescue and redeem us. When we shout our disbelief, you offer to us your love and are ready to receive us. Today as we have gathered, remembering all those who have gone before us, who have paved the way for our faith, help us to be aware that we stand in that same long line of witnesses to your love. Give us courage and strength to serve you in all that we do. Remind us again that you are not looking for us to be perfect before we come to you, for you will take our rough edges and make them smooth. You will find the sparkling gem in the rough stone. You will help us learn to serve and witness to

your love. Let us place our trust and our lives in your loving care. For we ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is The kingdom, and the power and the glory forever and ever. AMEN

Read the Lesson: Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4

The prophecy that Habakkuk the prophet received.

²How long, LORD, must I call for help,
but you do not listen?

Or cry out to you, "Violence!"
but you do not save?

³Why do you make me look at injustice?
Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?

Destruction and violence are before me;
there is strife, and conflict abounds.

⁴Therefore the law is paralyzed,
and justice never prevails.

The wicked hem in the righteous,
so that justice is perverted.

Read the Epistle Lesson: 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12

Paul, Silas^[a] and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

²Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters,^[b] and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing. ⁴Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.

Read the Gospel Lesson: Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ² A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³ He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

⁵ When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” ⁶ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

⁷ All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.”

⁸ 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.”

⁹ Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Message

The story of Zacchaeus reminds us of our fervent need to seek out Jesus above all in our lives, but this story also reminds us that Jesus is looking for us too. The story of Zacchaeus is a favorite in Sunday Schools, it is one many of us have grown up with! It's interesting that the story of Zacchaeus is told so often, that we even have a song about it, especially considering the fact that the story of Zacchaeus appears only in Luke's gospel! How many of you remember the song about Zacchaeus? It goes like this: “Zacchaeus was a wee little man, and a wee little man was he. He climbed up in a sycamore tree, for the Lord he wanted to see. And as the Master passed that way, He looked up in the tree. And He said, “Zacchaeus, you come down. For I'm going to your house today. For I'm going to your house today.”

To understand the full power of this story, we have to understand Zacchaeus. To begin with, Zacchaeus was a chief among tax collectors, which is about the worst thing you could be in the eyes of the Jewish people in Jesus' time. It was like turning traitor. Zacchaeus was a hated sinner. And I'm sure his parents never would have dreamed that he would turn out the way he did. You know why? Because the name Zacchaeus means “Pure,” or “Righteous.” He was given that name as a baby. His mother and father looked down upon him and thought he was the most precious little fellow in the world, so they named him, “Pure.” They knew and believed that God had great plans for his life so they named him, “Righteous.”

And I would imagine that Zacchaeus' parents probably did the best they could to help him to live into his name. They probably took him to the Temple. They probably taught him about God and maybe the scriptures. They probably loved him very, very much. And through their love and care, I would imagine that Zacchaeus was given just a little glimpse of the kind of love that God has for all people.

But as Zacchaeus began to grow up, he probably found that he was not growing as fast nor as tall as his peers. The word used for "short" in this passage literally means "an adult who has not grown out of a child's body." So Zacchaeus was probably quite troubled, perhaps even tormented by this. He probably had what many people refer to as "a Napoleon Complex." He felt insecure about his size, and therefore felt that he had to prove just how big, and tough, and unafraid he was by other means. He was probably made fun of at school, and perhaps he ended up getting into a lot of fights because of that. Or maybe he just got beat up and led a very lonely, isolated, and ostracized existence. He had been hurt one too many times. So he built walls of protection up between himself and others. But behind those walls was a desperately lonely and self-hating man who wanted nothing more than to be loved, accepted and understood.

When the Roman occupation came to Zacchaeus with an offer, an offer to be somebody; a job offer as a tax man, Zacchaeus faced a tough, but inevitable decision; whether or not to sell-out to Rome. As a tax collector he would have to pay Rome a certain amount for his territory and then, of course, he would get rich by charging people for more taxes than they really owed. Yes, he would have to rob, cheat and steal from many persons. He would also have to give up his religion, for he would no longer have access to the Temple. And he would be hated, truly hated; not just shunned or misunderstood, but he would be rich and he would have power. But this power, this money did not make Zacchaeus feel any better about life than he had before. So here we have Zacchaeus; he is rich, but lonely and hated; he is wealthy, but spiritually impoverished, and he knows it. He was still miserable. He still knew that he was lacking that love that his parents first introduced him to as a young child. He knew he was not living the life he had been created to live. He knew that he was not being the person that he really was and was capable of being. He knew he was desperate. Desperate for God.

So in our Gospel today we find Jesus approaching Jericho and he is passing through it. After three years of doing miracles, traveling around, teaching, even raising the dead; I am sure there was not a person in first century Palestine that had not heard of Jesus but there were sure people who had not seen him or had a chance to meet Him. Zacchaeus was one of those people and he wanted to at least

get a glimpse of the man. He wanted to get a chance to meet the prophet, the healer, but he had a problem though, he was short and there was a large crowd.

How bad off do you have to be in order to compromise your dignity? How bad do you have to want something before you go all out to get it?

Dignity and self-respect are a big deal for Middle Easterners now and even a bigger deal during Jesus' time. To get ahead of the crowd, our text says Zacchaeus had to run. To run in a robe means you have to hike it up a bit in order to not trip and fall. If that were not bad enough, Zacchaeus, a rich and widely known man, stooped to climbing a tree like a school boy. He must have really wanted to see Jesus badly in order to stoop to such a level!

So when Jesus comes along, he not only greets Zacchaeus sitting there in the tree (which would have made Zacchaeus more than happy); Jesus actually tells Zacchaeus that they are going to dine together that day, in Zacchaeus' house! I would imagine that nothing could have been farther from Zacchaeus' mind than that this Jesus from Galilee would choose to stay at his house! Jesus knew that Zacchaeus was a sinner; a thief, a liar, and a cheat. But, out of all the priests of the Temple, out of all the well-to-do and respected citizens; Jesus chose to dine at the home of the most hated and reviled member of this community.

So Jesus goes to Zacchaeus' house, and they shut the door and the crowd milled around outside and gossiped, but no one knew what went on inside. Jesus had dinner with Zacchaeus. Finally the door opened, and there stood Zacchaeus! Something radical had happened to this man! He admitted that he had been robbing the poor and promised to give half of his goods to the poor and to restore fourfold to those whom he had falsely taxed. Yes, something had happened inside Zacchaeus, and he was a new man! He experienced the saving love of Christ!

Jesus said to Zacchaeus: "Today salvation has come to this house...For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." Jesus is still entering and passing through the Jericho's of this world! Jesus is seeking the lost and hoping to dine with them. Just like Jesus invited Himself to Zacchaeus' home He invites Himself into our lives. He simply wants us to respond to His invitation. Have you respond? Amen.

Benediction:

You can heal, Christ has touched you.

You can love, Christ has sought you.

You can give yourself away.

Christ has come walking and called you.

You can break the barriers from which others suffer.

Christ has visited your house.

Christ is in you and around you.

Christ will set you free. Amen.