

## Get Out of That Tree!

When I was a child I loved to climb trees. There was one in the park across the road from where I lived. I don't know what kind of tree it was, it had a bend in the trunk that I would climb to and sit. In it I could watch the world going on below me without having to be part of it.

One day my Mam was looking for me because I hadn't come when called in for lunch. Truth is I hadn't heard her...I guess I'd gone too far from home. She came into the park and bellowed my name.

I called down to her and she said "Get out of that tree!  
If you fall and break your leg don't you come running to me!"

Parental logic.

I did get down, successfully, and I did climb it again. And again.

In today's gospel we hear the story of Zaccheus. He's described as a tax collector and also as a rich man. Back in that day, tax collectors were corrupt. They were hired by the Romans and given a list of people that they were to collect taxes from.

Except they added their own mark up. For example, if Mary Potter owed 100 silver pieces. Zaccheus would tell her she owed 300 silver pieces. She may not have 300 to give him, but would give him 250 silver pieces. He'd turn 80 silver pieces over and keep the rest.

Tax collectors were not nice people. And yet, they were still redeemable. In Jesus eyes nobody is nonredeemable.

Zaccheus was not well liked in his community. I don't think I'd much like him, to tell the truth. Yet Jesus saw something in him.

Let's back up a little bit...scripture tells us "He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way." (Luke 19.3-4)

There is an interesting play on words here..."he was short in stature". What is not fully developed is if it's Zaccheus who is short; or if it was Jesus. We do know that Zaccheus couldn't see because of the crowd.

If it was Zaccheus who was short he wouldn't be able to **see** over the crowd.

If it was Jesus who was short, Zaccheus wouldn't be able to see **him** over the crowd.

Regardless, Zaccheus runs ahead and climbs into a Sycamore tree. Sycamore trees can grow to 100 feet in length with a trunk diameter of 10 feet. We don't know how tall this particular tree is, and it really doesn't matter because it enabled Zaccheus to see Jesus AND for Jesus to see Zaccheus.

As Jesus passes by he looks up at Zaccheus, who was likely waving and shouting, and tells him to get out of the tree. He is to host Jesus at his home. Zaccheus is delighted, overjoyed with pride! The crowd – not so much.

They grumble that Jesus is going to be the guest of one who is a sinner. Harsh.

Zaccheus gets out of the tree without incident and promises, in front of the crowd that he will give half of his possessions to the poor and says if he has defrauded anyone he will pay them back four times.

That's a big promise.

Now, we don't get to find out if Zaccheus made good on his promise. Or even what he fed Jesus for lunch.

Because after all, this is a story from scripture, it doesn't have to have a happy ending; nor does it need to have any ending at all. Whoever was recording this event didn't have a complete account to report – and that's okay.

Jesus says to the crowd "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost." (Luke 16.9-10)

There's a pattern here. Jesus goes into these communities, not to meet with the brightest and best. He's there to meet the ordinary folks.

People like you and me. He talks to those that society would rather not deal with...the poor, the sick, the widows, the orphans, the elderly.

He talks to sex-workers and tax collectors. He sits with and listens to the addicted and disabled. He opens his heart to everyone who would come to him.

We know that Jesus is Divine, born of God, yet He is also human, born of Mary.

Why would Jesus hang out only with the rich and affluent? Why would he spend time with those who have already received his message? Jesus was out to turn society on its ear. He wasn't out to start his own religion, only to reform and refocus his faith and that of society at large. He wanted to focus less on the laws and rules and focus more on people.

His mandate on earth was to love and be loved. He was sent to tell the truth. He was sent to share and show love to all. And he only had 3 years to do it. His mandate was to shake up societal "norms" and turn everything that was taken for granted on its ear.

Again and again we hear of Jesus breaking societal rules; the Samaritan Woman at the well, healing on the Sabbath, turning over the tables in the temple, sending his followers out with no back-up...simply instructions to request hospitality in exchange for work and if it is not given – to shake off the dust and keep walking.

There is great power in Jesus message. "Salvation has come to this house, because HE TOO is a son of Abraham." (Luke 16.9) In other words, even a reprobate like this guy

Zaccheus (my words) deserves my attention. He is your brother. He is one of us. He is one of you. In Jesus eyes everyone is the same. Those who need to be seen, receive his attention.

Jesus isn't in Jericho for fun. He isn't there by chance.

"[He] came to seek out and to save the lost" (Luke 16.10) Jesus came to show Zaccheus, to show him his heart, to show him that there is another way. A different way apart from money, prestige and power.

Which goes to show us that it doesn't matter how much we have in earthly riches, if we do not know God, we are destitute. We can give of ourselves in everything we do, yet if we do it for recognition and fame, it's not worth much of anything.

Jesus showed Zaccheus up to the crowd...and showed the crowd up to Zaccheus.

We don't know how this story ends, yet we do know that Jesus affected all who were present.

I used to climb trees so I could observe the world below, but not be a part of it. I was a painfully shy child, afraid of my own shadow. I would cling to my mother's skirts at events where there would be a crowd of people and hold my breath until it was time to go home to the safety of my room.  
To this day, I'm not a fan of crowds.

Sitting in a tree gave me a different perspective on the world, as it did for Zaccheus. Unlike Zaccheus, there was no crowd of people passing beneath me. Nobody looked up to see me in the tree, which suited me just fine.  
I would watch the children play and pretend I was part of them. I wouldn't come out of the tree until there was nobody around.

Zaccheus climbed the tree to see over the crowd. To see Jesus.  
And not only did Jesus see Zaccheus, he summoned him from the tree to be of service.  
In other words Jesus said "I choose you" to Zaccheus.

He did this in front of a crowd that despised Zaccheus. He did the completely unexpected in choosing this tax collector to provide him with hospitality.

Yet Jesus was not choosing a tax collector.  
He was choosing a child of Abraham.  
He was choosing a child of God.  
He was choosing one of the chosen.

When those moments rear up that tell us we are not enough, remember the story of Zaccheus. He climbed up that tree to give him an advantage over the crowd. He climbed down from that tree to be exposed as one who was not above reproach.

He climbed up a man of pride.  
He climbed down a man of humility.

He was named as one that we all are...children of God.

Whether your tree is one of fame, fortune, prestige, addiction, illness, jealousy, anger or hatred, it's time to climb down. It's time to take the hand of Jesus and release yourself from that which no longer serves you. It is time to choose love over fear.

Get out of that tree!

Rev. Andrea L. Brennan, B.A., M.Div.  
Pastor, Christ Church Anglican and Knox United Church  
Fernie, BC

21<sup>st</sup> after Pentecost  
Habbakuk 1.1-2.4  
Psalm 119.137-144  
2 Thessalonians 1.1-12  
Luke 19.1-10