

Text: Luke 19.1-10
St Stephen's

Feb 22, 2009
Sun AM

Plus Ultra: God Changed Lives

In the month of Feb we have been thinking about why we are here, touching base with our vision, and we have been using the National Motto of the country of Spain for our headline, '**Plus Ultra**'. Plus Ultra means 'more beyond', and as we move through the **realignment in Anglicanism**, we are sensing that this is a time to think things over and maybe do some things differently. And in this season, we are **believing God is asking us, inviting us to reach for 'More Beyond.'** So we are inviting you to reach for '**More Beyond**' in your own walk with the Lord. We are asking that this church become a 'More beyond' place.

We've watched people **respond to Jesus** and join this huge **crowd** and then become his **disciples** and then become his **Apostles**. All because when they met him, they knew that there was '**more beyond**'. And there is.

We welcomed **Mario Bergner** a couple of weeks ago, and heard his story about the journey from sexual brokenness to a healed and forgiven life and how it happened he **threw himself at the feet of Jesus**. Healing came, and that was decades ago and Mario and Nancy have been married for 20 years and have 5 wonderful kids - and he has dedicated his life to a **nationwide ministry** to people who have been caught in sexual brokenness of all kinds. And there isn't a family here who hasn't had to deal with that at home or in these communities, because that is the world we live in. **There is 'more beyond'**.

Last week we looked at the formation of **Christian character**, and at the little phrase, 'walking in the light' from 1 John. We talked about the tremendous power of accountability, of honesty and confession and of fellowship that are circles of God's light and God's love. We saw how in the Wesleyan movement of the first great Awakening, these small groups became the place where Christlike character was formed in thousands

and thousands of people. I asked you to consider **being in a group where we can 'watch over each other in love', and let Christ form our character.** Because there is more beyond.

Today, we are going to look at one of the touching stories of the NT, a **personal encounter between a man and Jesus.** It happened near the end of Jesus' earthly life, on his way to Jerusalem, on his way, he well knows, to the cross. As he was moving towards Jerusalem, he went through Jericho. There, he met a man by the name of Zacchaeus.

A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. Luke 19:2

We are told that he was *"a chief tax collector and was wealthy"*

That's a lot to say about a man. It means that he had **turned his back** on his own people and become an agent of the Roman occupying forces. He collected taxes for them from the Jews, from his own people. From what he collected, he **skimmed off the top and had gotten rich.**

I think of him as a **modern man:** he had jettisoned his history and his heritage for the sake wealth and pleasure. God meant nothing to him anymore. He hated all the religious hypocrites around him... and they hated him. His was a lonely world, and though he had gained much, he had also lost much. That probably worked for a while, but I suspect it had begun to wear thin. **Pleasure** and **money** had not delivered on their promises. So something happened to Zaccheus. He was **looking for something more.**

"He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way".

Luke 19:3-4

He wanted to see Jesus so much that he climbed a tree. What do you think caught his attention? Maybe he heard about how Jesus had been **hanging out** and going to parties with the tax collectors. Maybe he heard how Jesus had reached out to **Matthew**, another tax collector.

And how Matthew had **become one of his disciples**. Maybe Zacchaeus began to wonder about this guy named Jesus...

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

Luke 19:5

Jesus walks straight through the crowd and right up to that tree and He stops. In a large crowd He notices Zacchaeus. He looks right up at him. I can imagine Zacchaeus 's heart starting to pound, his stomach sinks, his head is about to explode, his mouth goes dry... "He's looking at *me!* He's coming right to this tree! What's he doing? Out of all the people in Jericho He's looking at *me!*"

And then he **called him by name**, 'Zacchaeus!' Imagine his shock. "How does He know my name?" I wonder about that, too. Maybe it was **supernatural knowledge**. Might have been. But I would guess that something else was involved here. I'd call it a **supernatural love**.

I think Jesus knew the name of the biggest scoundrel in town because **he made it a point to know the names of the biggest scoundrels in town. Jesus had a ministry to these people; he cared about them.** He had known **Matthew**. Matthew would have known all the other tax collectors, and even **threw parties** for them to introduce them to Jesus. I'll bet that Matthew had been **praying** about the opportunity to introduce Jesus to Zacc. for a long time. I'll bet he **told Jesus** about Zacc., and then they came to Jericho. "Look, Jesus, remember that Zacc guy I was telling you about and we were praying about, that guy who's a **real problem?** Well there he is, right **up in that tree** over there." That's all Jesus needed, because Zacc had been on his heart for a long time.

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

Luke 19:7

A close look at the verbs Luke uses indicate that Zacchaeus scrambled down and **welcomed Jesus to his home** for the night. So Jesus disappears into this house with this notorious guy, and everyone else is outside **muttering** about it. *"I can't believe that! Why would he do that?? That guy is a traitor, he is such a lost cause!!"*

Inside that house there was a dinner meal and a conversation. Just Zacchaeus and Jesus. I wonder what was said. We aren't told. Maybe Jesus just asked him questions. And listened to him and looked carefully. Maybe Jesus told him some of his stories. I am quite sure that Jesus **didn't lecture him**. And I am quite sure that before long, Zacchaeus knew that Jesus **really cared** about him. And that his life **could take a new turn**. And that he **didn't want to miss this chance**.

Many of us have had a moment just like that. Soon enough they came out and **faced that muttering crowd**.

"Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, 'I'll give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I've cheated anyone, I'll give them back four times the amount.' Jesus responded, 'Salvation has come to this home today!'"

Luke 19:8-9 (NCV)

He was a changed man. Before that day, his motto might have been, **'I'll get...'** But now it was **'I'll give...'** Twice he says it. Jesus simply sums it up, "Today salvation has come to this home."

Jesus **didn't stay long**. He could have. Maybe should have. There was much to talk about. Basic discipleship. Some mentoring. Some prayer. A teaching series on the bible, with outlines. Those things take time. But just that night in Zacc house, then **Jesus moved on, towards Jerusalem. Towards the cross**. Towards his wonderful, terrible, world changing, life changing death. He wouldn't be deterred. **Because the world was filled with modern men like Zacchaeus**. It still is. And he came to seek and save the lost. He still does.