

Sermon Text: Luke 19:1-10

Let us pray. Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of every heart be acceptable unto You, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I remember when my youngest daughter, Christina, was small. She was about four years old, and she would get things confused, and she was also very confident about it. She would get it wrong yet she was confident that she was right. I don't know if you've ever had a daughter like that? Husband or wife? Anyway. She would get the song about Zaccheus and the song about Little Bunny Foo Foo confused. She would sing, "Little bunny Foo Foo hopping through the forest, gathering up the field mice, bopping them on the head, and then the bunny said, "Zaccheus, you come down!" She'd say that's the way it goes. That's not the way it goes.

This is All Saints Sunday, and I looked at the Zaccheus text, and I thought, is there an All Saints message? I believe there is. On All Saints Sunday we remember those who have gone before us, who have faithfully lived and struggled and grown in their faith. All Saints reminds us that all who claim and grow and live out their faith in Jesus Christ are indeed saints! In that way, each one of us is called to be a saint, and each one of us can be because of the love of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

You may think, now, that's a heavy burden. Well, Jesus knew that. That is why he said in Matthew 11, "Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls," and here's the good part, "for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." I quoted that once off the top of my head in a Bible study I did for the community in Bamberg, and a lady who went to the Baptist church on the other side of the block said, "Now, that's not in my Bible, about this light burden and yoke." She thought that faith was a heavy thing and the burden was a hard thing.

If you think living every day knowing you are a child of God is a hard thing, try living knowing you are merely a child of your every wandering desire. See if that's not harder. Addicted to finding one distraction after another to avoid thinking about your emptiness. Self-serving is much harder and more costly than serving God.

Christians, see yourselves as God sees you – saints who occasionally sin! See yourselves as saints in the making. Think of yourself as a saint in the making, and see how that changes the way you live, the way you act, your priorities in the world. You are called, called out from the world and the world's standards to be God's and God's hope. (Something happened to the microphone.)

Today, we remember those who lived and died in the faith, and we also remember that they struggled, and they grew in their faith through their struggles as they lived it out before us. They made a difference.

True story. There was a bomb threat. I'm not sure why I feel compelled to say a true story is a true story. I don't know. Do preachers mostly make up things? This is a true

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story. There was a bomb threat a couple of years ago at a meeting at the South Indiana Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. 1,800 people were there for an ordination service, and there was a telephoned bomb threat. The auditorium at the Indiana university was quickly emptied. They searched the place, and they couldn't find anything. Nothing was found. 45 minutes later they said they could reenter so 1,800 Methodists started to go back through the door, but the security people because of liability concerns kept saying over, “Please enter at your own risk. Please enter at your own risk. Enter at your own risk.” Now, that's strange counsel for people entering a worship service, or is it?

Imagine entering our sanctuary, and your eyes fall upon a sign back there, or we coach and counsel our ushers and greeters to say to everyone, “Please enter at your own risk because after this service your life may never be the same!” If you believe, God will sooner or later work a change in your life. You and I are called to become saints of God, saints in the making. As Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works.” Why? And give glory to your Father, who is in Heaven. Not give glory to you, but give glory to the God who has called you and enabled you to truly, out of your heart, do good works, out of your heart be generous, loving, and graceful.

Saint Zaccheus was first a tax collector for Rome. I wanted Kit to be quiet. She stole part of my sermon! Zaccheus was a tax collector, and in today's reading, at first, he was just a curious onlooker when Jesus came to town. He was not really a part of the crowd. He was as alienated from that crowd of people as anybody could be, not by his physical stature, but by his choice to betray his country, to betray his friends and neighbors. See, he was taking more than Rome wanted in taxes, and he was keeping for himself the extra dollars. What people will do for money!

Yes, Zaccheus was alienated, but after talking to Jesus, after sharing a meal with Jesus and having Jesus treat him like a person instead of an insect, he was shocked! Jesus received him, and it changed him. He said I'll give half of what I have to the poor! It says he was very rich. And quadruple to any I have wronged! He had given up perhaps on forgiveness a long time ago. Imagine, if you were Zaccheus, all the hated glances you would get! All the slammed doors in your face and the depersonalizing refusal to make eye contact with you! Then this Jesus calls him down from the tree, and says today, I will be eating with you, Zaccheus. Jesus treated him as a person, as someone who had worth and possibilities and a future!

Saints are those who echo Jesus' invitation to the alien, echo Jesus' invitation to the outcast and to the sinner, to those whom everyone else has judged and hated and condemned and written off! Saints are those who echo the invitation that Jesus gave to Zaccheus. Saints are those who struggle to grow in their faith and struggle to expand their invitation list in just how far and how public they're going to go with their faith. Saints struggle to be forgiving as God has forgiven us because we know in our hearts that it cost God to love and to forgive each of us. There is much to overcome. There is much to push aside. There is much to wipe away to find the image of God that remains within us.

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It is God in Christ who gives us our worthiness. It is God in Christ who loves us. It is God in Christ who forgives us and gives us a new beginning.

So many people will say, and I've heard so many people say, my life is over. My life is over! Then, when they comprehend that God actually and factually loves them must mean and see that Jesus is the proof of that, then they can smile and can connect with God, and can connect with others, and start life over with love at the core instead of alienation, instead of guilt, instead of shame! That is what Jesus did for Zaccheus, Zaccheus the saint in the making. He found in Jesus a new beginning. I'm sure he said to himself, wait a minute! Instead of merely being satisfied with money and a side order of contempt from all my neighbors, I can have something else? Are you saying that I can start over? Why, I'll give half my money away and quadruple back to those I have betrayed!

After connecting to Jesus and his love and grace, he began to see that he should connect with the others whose hatred he had purchased by his own misdeeds. Zaccheus said, “I must undo the wrong I have done! I must return what I took, but no, that's not enough! I caused hardship and pain and poverty for families, and so I will return what I took and interest!”

If you read the Old Testament, and not many do, but if you read it and study it, there is a theme in Jewish law of paying back with interest or with a penalty what you have taken wrongly or stolen. What Zaccheus gave back because he felt such overflowing grace from Christ was way more than the Old Testament ever required. He saw himself as a conduit for God's grace echoed out to others. He knew that in Jesus he had received amazing grace and forgiveness and love, and so he gave back quadruple what he had taken.

Do you understand that such an amazing payback was never required by the law? Never! He did not just set things right. He didn't just get things back to even. He gave back four times what he had taken! Now, instead of Zaccheus profiting from his abuse of power, now the victims were profiting from Zaccheus coming to faith.

Who profits from your faith? He was not seeking to do mere justice, but he was adding grace on top of grace on top of the limits of the law. What do you think happened to the people who got their money back? It kind of reminds me of one of the many versions of that Geico commercial? The little Geico commercial? You know, the little lizard thing comes on, and one of the things he says is, if you want to make friends, giving away money is not a bad idea.

Well, that's not exactly what Zaccheus was doing. Rather, he saw himself as connected to the community again, and he wanted to give grace to others just as he had gotten grace from Jesus Christ. Reconnection and restoration meant more to him after meeting Jesus than mere money.

This brings up a curious question in my mind. The New Testament does not specifically mention tithing. It does say you should freely give and generously give toward the work

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of the church, but the New Testament does not reiterate the Old Testament requirement under the law to give ten percent to God through the temple. Notice Zaccheus and how meeting Jesus changed the way he felt about money. He could have searched the law, and he could have found the precise penalty for his misdeeds, and he could have given that and called it even. Just as some gave the bare ten percent and stopped. The question is this I think, if under the law, ten percent giving was required, then how much do you reckon we should give under grace? That’s the question.

There was compulsion for tithing under the law, but for those who have been freely and completely forgiven and given a new start under grace, what should the amount be? Or as Zaccheus responded, shouldn’t the amount be even more? It’s a good question. It’s a good thing to ponder. Zaccheus matched God’s generosity towards him with his generosity towards others, and he now found his security in God’s love through Christ, and he immediately became more just and more graceful and more generous to others.

Saints, I think, are generous and know that people are worth their time and their trouble and their treasure. Saints spend their lives knowing that stuff is eventually dust and rust and decay, and no one can take it with them. All you can do with stuff is show whom and what you value and love while you’re alive. If you have enough to eat, and you trust in God, and you have some people who love you and some people whom you love, then you are a wealthy woman or a wealthy man. If you have all the money in the world, and no one to come by your bedside when you are ill or alone, and you have people who show up only to see if they are in the will, then you are alone!

Zaccheus was obsessed with things until he met Jesus, who changed him from money-mad and alone to one who cared for justice and others instead of his ill-gotten gains.

Another thing. I’m switching gears here a bit. I think that saints don’t notice externals. I may get a little personal here. I will never forget, and you will never see a picture of this, how when I was 17 years old, I grew a Joe Namath Fu Manchu, and I let my hair grow really long between my junior and senior years. My senior picture is that way. It was part rebellion. It was part just being 17. I wanted to cause comment. I did. That summer, I went to see my grandmother as I did every summer of my life in Knoxville, and I thought; now MeeMaw is going to say something about my hair. I kind of smiled a little bit. I thought she was going to say something, and I was going to claim it was my right, and it didn’t matter, and all that. She just hugged me! She said, oh, Jimmy’s here! Actually, she said Jim Ed’s here. Ed is no part of my name, and I don’t know why she called me that, but that’s what she called me. She didn’t say a thing about my hair, a thing about my Joe Namath mustache, not a blessed word! It simply did not matter to her. She saw me, not the hair.

I think that I have learned over the years that saints are people who don’t pay a lot of attention to externals; how you dress, how you look – they just care about you. That’s the way Jesus cared about Zaccheus, who was an outcast of outcasts. Jesus accepted him, and it changed him, and it gave him hope just like the people in your life who have accepted and loved you no matter what! Those people have changed you, and those people have given you hope, and you know whom those people were.

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We do divide ourselves up in so many ways, and we do point fingers, and we do judge about so many things that don't matter a hill of beans. Followers of Jesus Christ in mind and heart and deed grow beyond that.

Chuck Swindell tells about an incident that occurred in his church many years ago. It was in the late '60s. A young man stumbled into Chuck's service one Sunday morning, and he had long straggly hair and he hadn't bathed in many days, and he looked as if he'd been living on Fritos and beer and drugs. With a dazed look in his eyes, he wasn't even sure where he was. He tried to find a seat, but the church was full, and nobody was making any room for him. It was finally one of those precious pillars of the church, a medical doctor, who finally moved over and invited him down near the front. After awhile, the boy looked around, still dazed, and he said, "What kind of place is this?" The doctor said, "This is a church." The boy said, "This is a scary place, isn't it? What do people do here anyway?" Thoughtfully, the doctor tried to answer him. He said, "Well, people come here who are hurting to get their lives back together." The boy pointed up to the pulpit and said, "What do they do on that box?" The doctor said, "Well, the minister stands there, and he talks to us." The boy said, "What does he say?" The doctor said, "Wait a minute, and you'll hear." To make a long story short, the young man did stay to listen, and because of the love and kindness of that doctor and many others in the congregation, he became a part of the community. He later made a profession of faith in Christ, was baptized, went to college, went to seminary, and today he is a pastor. No, it wasn't me. Chuck Swindell wrote and said, "Now that young man is the pastor to my son and his family. It is so wonderful! It is hard to believe! He's come full circle. That young man who walked into my church that Sunday morning, who almost didn't get a seat except a saint invited him over, is now the pastor to my grandchildren!"

In a former church, I remember a man, a disturbed man, who wore a customized ring he had made, and on it, it said, "God." He came to my church sometimes. He stopped to speak to me sometimes. He was one of those walking wounded in our world. Truth be told, we all are. Once he told me that he was tired of being God. You see, he thought he was God. He said the job was too hard. A week later, he was dead. I was asked to speak at his funeral.

There are so many saints of so many types that have passed our way, and some we miss if we're looking for halos. Before meeting Jesus, Zaccheus was also a walking wounded. He had the very best clothes. He had the biggest bank account in town, but he was so alone, and maybe even a little madness attacked him each night when he thought about what he had done, or maybe he worried that he no longer felt any guilt at all for what he had done, and he didn't feel much of anything anymore! He was so alone before he met Jesus. That all changed after Jesus gave him hope. Saints give us love, encouragement and hope. They can do that because they have first gotten these things from God.

I love the story, and I am closing now in case you're looking at your watch. I love the story of a grandmother and a mother and little boy, three generations, who went to a restaurant, and they sat down to order. The waitress took the grandmother's order, took the mother's order, and then she turned to the little boy and said, "What would you like?" The mother immediately said, "Oh, oh, I'll order for him," but the waitress just kept

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looking right at the boy, and again said, “What would you like?” The boy’s eyes got as big as saucers, and then he looked at his mom, and said, “She thinks I’m real!”

Saints think other people are real and worthy. Before Jesus, Zaccheus thought only money was real, but notice what happened afterward. He knew that God’s love was real, that other people were real, and that he needed to reconnect to both, and that was a new beginning, a real new beginning, when he found that hope was possible! God’s grace has blessed us through the saints who have touched our lives, through watching their mountaintops, and through watching them struggle through the valley as well. Now, may God bless us in our grief this day as we miss those who are now gone from us.

I call your attention to the liturgy in your bulletins. Let us turn to that for our All Saints Litany. Join me please in our responsive reading.

Everliving God,

 this day revives in us memories of loved ones who are no more.

What happiness we shared when they walked among us.

What joy, when, loving and being loved, we lived our lives together.

Their memory is a blessing for ever.

Months or years may have passed, and still we feel near to them.

Our hearts yearn for them.

Though the bitter grief has softened, a duller pain abides;

 for the place where once they stood is empty now.

The links of life are broken, but the links of love and longing cannot break.

Their souls are bound up in ours for ever.

We see them now with the eye of memory,

 their faults forgiven, their virtues grown larger.

So does goodness live, and weakness fade from sight.

We remember them with gratitude and bless their names.

Their memory is a blessing for ever.

And we remember as well the members

 who but yesterday were part of our congregation and community.

To all who cared for us and labored for all people, we pay tribute.

May we prove **worth** of carrying on the tradition of our faith,

 for now the task is ours.

Their souls are bound up in ours for ever.

We give you thanks that they now live and reign with you.

As a great **crowd** of witnesses,

 they surround us with their blessings,

 and offer you hymns of praise and thanksgiving.

They are alive for ever more. Amen.

“Paying Back, With Interest”
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Let us remember those who have passed since our last celebration of this day.

John Paul Rush, Dorothy Hill, Ann Taylor Wright, Charles Furman Bagwell, Buddy Roberts, Becky Melton, Doris McKinney, Dorothy Bell, Blanche Sherrill, Lila Massengill, Nina Traynham, Louise Colvert, Louise Whatley, Taylor Latimer, Jimmy Sligh, Fred Panasuik, Carol Scurry, Flossie McMahan, Drake Anderson, Shorty Callison, Mamie Scurry, Reverend Lewis Sherard, Griff Williams, Heyward Stroud, Sam Koon.

Remembering their lives, their struggles, their faith and examples, let us stand to sing #702.