

Worship for October 15, 2023

Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.
Philippians 3:13-14

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

*Call to Worship

As Jesus called to Zaccheus, so he calls us.

Jesus longs to abide with us:

Here in this place, in our homes, at our games, in the marketplace, and wherever the body of Christ is gathered.

Jesus invites us, just as we are.

Let us worship God, who calls us by name, who came to seek and save the lost.

Let us praise God's name together!

*Hymn 39 Great Is Thy Faithfulness

Prayer *Athlete's Prayer* Gregg Easterbook

God, let me play well, but fairly.

Let competition make me strong but never hostile.

Forbid me to rejoice in the adversity of others.

See me not when I am cheered, but when I bend to help my opponent up.

If I know victory, allow me to be happy.

If I am denied, keep me from envy.

Remind me that sports are games.

Help me to learn something that matters once the game is over.

And if through games I set an example, let it be a good one. Amen.

Hymn 698 Take, O Take Me As I Am

Assurance of Forgiveness

Friends, God's mercy is from everlasting to everlasting.

Never giving up on us, God's love pursues, guides, and "coaches" us our whole lives long.

God is always in our corner, ready to forgive and set us free from sin. Be at peace.

First Scripture Reading Hebrews 12:1-3

Time With Our Young Disciples

Gospel Reading Luke 19:1-10

Morning Message

Do you remember the song?

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 Savior passed that way, he looked up in that tree.

“Zacchaeus, come on down!

For I’m going to your house today.

I’m going to your house today.”

One of my kids always insisted Jesus said, “I’m going to your house for tea.”

I’ve always liked Zacchaeus. He was short. Short people have some unique problems. They’re always picked last for games. No athlete aspires to be short in adulthood, unless they’re a jockey or maybe a gymnast. Short people have to learn to adapt. Can’t reach something on the top shelf of a grocery store aisle? Grab a broom from the household supply aisle and knock it down. I’m not above it.

When we were still at Marshall, I had to drive Ed to the ER one day. He had fallen at a rehearsal and his ankle looked like it might be broken. The driver’s seat in Ed’s car wasn’t adjustable. He’s a foot taller than I am. I drove with Norton’s anthology of English Literature behind my back. I did what I had done all my life: adapted.

Zacchaeus had probably lived a lifetime of not being acknowledged, overlooked, pushed to the back of the crowd. And since he was a dreaded tax collector, he

probably endured frequent ridicule. If his temple had Bring a Friend Sabbath, I don't know who he would invite. And I doubt he had many invitations to tailgate.

But, like all short people, Zacchaeus had learned to adapt to his environment. Which is why he was up in that tree. He had a bird's eye view of the gathering in the town square.

He achieved his goal. He did see Jesus. And Jesus saw him and something unexpected happens.

Pastor and author Bruce Epperly suggests in *The Adventurous Lectionary*, the story of Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus portrays the quest for spiritual stature. Jesus is passing by but Zacchaeus can't see him because he is short in stature.

While the gospel writer is pointing to Zacchaeus' height; he is also describing his spirit.

Before he heard of Jesus' visit, Zacchaeus had a small soul. Some commentators think he may have even cultivated a cramped spirit, focusing primarily on his occupation which had him assessing property and prosperity to the exclusion of forming healthy personal connections, friendships, and becoming invested in the life of the whole community.

His small spirit allowed him to deny the pain and hardship he inflicted on others. Small in stature, Zacchaeus climbs a tree. He needs a larger vision. He needs to see Jesus more clearly. He needs a wider perspective.

Zacchaeus is being called from self-focus, from that rugged individualism we Appalachians love to tout, to a broader interest in the world around him.

When Jesus notices Zacchaeus, he invited himself to the tax collector's home. Now, if Jesus called me or sent me a text saying he was on his way over to my house, I confess my first thought wouldn't be about what a blessing this is. Nope. My first thought would be, do I cook or do I clean? So, we see, Zacchaeus isn't the only one who needs a wider vision.

The community may have been scandalized that Jesus was having dinner with Zacchaeus. His self-righteous neighbors are grumbling. He may be rich and powerful, but, Zacchaeus is a social outcast because of his profession. He is a Roman agent. Surely Jesus doesn't want to dine with this man.

But, Jesus is always surprising us, which makes some people uncomfortable and some even angry. Before we think that wouldn't happen here, think again. This community has had its share of unpopular community officials. I don't think we'd want to be seen with some of them.

Once again, Jesus demonstrates a new way of life. Jesus' spiritual stature allowed him to eat with sinners and women, to embrace the clean and unclean, the socially acceptable and those who were called social misfits.

Jesus thinks big. He looks beyond appearances and beyond social expectations to discern God's deep work taking place in Zacchaeus' soul.

His spiritual stature grows. He sees a larger vision of himself. He sees the error of his ways and the importance of setting things right. He makes a commitment to a higher standard in his work, work based on honesty and integrity and generosity.

People were never again to be exploited, taken advantage of, but honored and respected. In this way the whole community could be transformed.

Jesus now proclaims that salvation, wholeness, and healing have come to those who were thought to be lost. Salvation is about a larger perspective, a new vision of reality, and values, and maybe even vocation. The Christian faith is about conforming to those qualities we see in Jesus. Jesus proclaimed the value of every man, woman, and child. He cared about what was right and true and good for the community, for his neighborhood and the one across town. Jesus cares for the people of the middle East. We know it grieves him that innocent lives were lost in recent days in Israel and Gaza. He was always opposed to exploitation and derision, and injustice, the de-humanization of others, which is what it takes to inflict the atrocities suffered.

In large part the Protestant Reformation was about these things, too. When Martin Luther nailed those 95 theses to the door of the Wittenburg Chapel, he was standing up for the people the Church had exploited. And thanks to the printing press, which came along in that era, people like us would finally be able to read the Word of God, the Bible, in their own language. Until that moment in history, Scripture was read and interpreted by clergy, and it wasn't always beneficial to the masses. In fact it could, and still can be, twisted and contorted in devastating ways.

Much more could be said about the Reformation, but, we will save that for another time.

Poet Howard Thurman penned these words:

Each night by bonny, sturdy lad
persists in adding to his "now I lay me down to sleep,"
the earnest wistful plea:
"God, make me big."
And I, his mother, with greater need,
do echo in a humbled, contrite heart,
"God, make me big."

Current events, tragic events like what happened to our Jewish brothers and sisters can constrict our visions. Fear creeps or crashes in on us. We can become imprisoned by our desire for security, safety, and affluence and fail to remember Paul's admonition that when one of us is hurt, all of us hurt. God is calling us to larger visions and larger spirits to match the challenges of our time.

Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and so can we. God can "make us big,"
And we can discover that even within limitations, no matter our physical stature or skill, we can adapt and the possibilities are unlimited.

I pray that God will make our spirits big, too.

*Hymn God, You Give Us Recreation (There's a Wideness In God's Mercy)
Verses 1 and 2 Carolyn Winfrey Gillette

*Affirmation of Faith Apostles' Creed p. 35

*Hymn 581 Gloria Patri

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns
Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Presenting Our Gifts of Tithes and Offering
Offertory

*Hymn 606 Doxology

*Prayer of Dedication

*Hymn God, You Give Us Recreation, Verse 3

*Blessing

As we move from this place to our fellowship hall, let us give God thanks:
For food in a world where many walk in hunger;
for faith in a world where many walk in fear;
for friends in a world where many walk alone;
we give you thanks, O Lord, and go out to love and serve you. Amen.

*Postlude