

October 30, 2022 21st Sunday after Pentecost Reformation Sunday

Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12 Luke 19:1-10

“Worthy of the Call”

1. You may have noticed that the bulletin says today is Reformation Sunday
 - a. It was the early 1500s, and there was trouble brewing within the church, with controversies, corruption, and Martin Luther, a German priest, stood up and called out the church in Rome to repentance.
 - i. You may have heard of his 95 theses nailed to a door of All Saints' Church, in Wittenberg. They were actually 95 statements on which Luther wanted to have a debate on ways he saw the church heading in wrong directions
https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/luther_martin/theses/95theses.cfm
 - b. The Pope didn't take to his comments and kicked him out of the church
 - c. But that didn't stop him or his followers from continuing as followers of Jesus, and the Reformation was born. Thus began the Lutheran Church.
 - d. Almost 30 years later, John Calvin, joined the critique of the church in Rome.
 - e. His argument basically was that we have to go back to basics,
 - i. not distracted by traditions which are not deeply rooted in the bible,
 - ii. but we needed to return to what the scriptures say first,
 - iii. and then let the wisdom of faithful teachers and saints add to it.
 - f. Calvin had to flee his native France to avoid being captured and settled eventually in Geneva where he served a pastor and continued to write.
 - i. Thus began the Reformed tradition, which when it went to Scotland became the Church of Scotland,
 - ii. and when it came to the States it became known as the Presbyterian Church.
 - g. So, if someone were to ask what the Reformation was all about, I think we can say that basically it is about calling the church to repentance and to return to basics.
2. That works well for today, because a good image of returning to basics is the story of Zacchaeus
 - a. Zacchaeus was figuratively and literally looked down upon by his neighbors.
 - i. First of all, it was because of his job.
 1. Being a tax collector wasn't like being an IRS agent
 2. A tax collector worked for the occupying Roman empire, the enemy, and doing their dirty work for them: collecting high taxes
 3. What's more, a tax collector would have inflated the amount owed, so that he would keep some of the money from the people.
 4. For that reason, a tax collector would be despised.
 5. And as you could understand, a tax collector would be feared, because they held a great deal of power of the people.
 - ii. And of course, the story makes the point that he was short in stature
 1. We aren't sure if he was just short or if he was a person with dwarfism
 2. Either way, culturally a person of short stature would not have been taken seriously
 3. One could certainly imagine that Zacchaeus had a chip on his shoulder, then, and wasn't a popular figure in town

- iii. Interestingly, the name Zacchaeus means “Pure, innocent,” which sets up an ironic character (the crook’s name is “innocent!”)
 - <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2195/kjv/tr/0-1/>
- b. One more element about Zacchaeus:
 - i. It seems that he kept his ill-gotten gains
 - ii. No, not a Robin Hood story here, stealing from the rich to give to the poor.
 - iii. Also not like some drug king pins who make their living off the misery of people, yet they protect themselves by giving food or gifts or employment to the poorest of the poor near them, to buy themselves good will.
- c. So we come to the story and notice that Zacchaeus is curious to see Jesus.
 - i. It doesn’t say anything about Zacchaeus wanting to hear Jesus, or to ask him a question. Just see him.
 - ii. And so he wants to this from a distance. But how?
 - iii. He figured the route Jesus would take, and he gets ahead of the crowd, climbs a tree and catches a glimpse of the famous teacher and healer. The end.
 - iv. Well, no, not the end. Jesus sees him. That makes the story turn.
- d. Zacchaeus likely resented not being seen as a human being.
 - i. He was Jewish, but he was seen instead as a traitor for collaborating with the Roman Empire. But Jesus sees him.
 - ii. Now, to be clear, Jesus eventually makes it clear he saw Zacchaeus as being someone in need of repentance, someone who needed to make his way back to God, but Jesus saw Zacchaeus as a person, and then surprisingly invites himself to his home for dinner.
 - iii. So, Zacchaeus hurries down and gets to host the famous teacher. The end.
 - iv. Well, no, not the end. The crowd jeers and expresses their disdain for Zacchaeus and they then start criticizing Jesus: this guy! He eats with sinners!!
- e. Um, yeah, that is ALL Jesus did, hangout with those deemed sinful or marginalized or hated.
 - i. That was what he did.
 - ii. He wasn’t afraid to be with people no one else liked, he wasn’t afraid to call out those who were too full of themselves, he WANTED to show that God wanted to be with each one of us.
 - iii. What happens next is an open question for me.
 - 1. Was Zacchaeus responding to the jeering crowd or was he motivated by a sense of conversion within his heart because of meeting Jesus?
 - 2. Zacchaeus, whose sin had been stealing from people, chooses to give half of his bank account to people living in poverty, and if (!?) he had defrauded anyone, he’d make it right 4-fold.
 - 3. The crowd gets really quiet (that or they’ve gone running to their homes to get their tax receipts to get some money back from Zacchaeus!)
 - iv. In his actions, Zacchaeus sees himself in a mirror, and he sees what he had become. And he also sees his community for who they are, not just as the easy marks from whom to steal money.
 - v. As I mentioned earlier, Zacchaeus is getting back to basics.

1. Zacchaeus strips down all the excess (financial and moral) and it is like a weight has been lifted from him.
2. Jesus is helping him see his way back to the community.
- vi. And Jesus then says: See what I mean? Salvation has come to this house. Because he is a child of God. The end. This time really, the end.
3. You and I have, from time to time in our lives, and perhaps even now, been drawn to Jesus, curious about who Jesus is and what Jesus is about, but perhaps like Zacchaeus, we have wanted to see Jesus from a distance, not too close.
 - a. That is to say: we want to know more, but we realize that getting too close may mean we'd have to change, somehow
 - i. Maybe we wanted to see Jesus from the safety of doing our own thing, hearing what he had to say, but very much staying in control, even as we might be committed to do the right thing.
 - ii. Maybe we wanted to come sit in worship to feel that wonderful feeling of renewal and then go home strengthened for another week, but very much keeping the God conversation limited to Sunday mornings.
 - iii. That is all fine and good as a beginning point, to be sure.
 - b. But we run the risk of finding yourselves in a Zacchaeus moment, when Jesus looks up to whatever tree we've climbed to see Jesus from a safe distance
 - i. What happens when Jesus looks up and sees us, and calls us to action?
 - ii. We might feel really called to fight against injustice, as Jesus did
 1. Or called to change our priorities to serve those in need, as Jesus did
 2. Or called to take seriously what the bible says about loving our God with all our being, and our neighbors as ourselves, as Jesus did
 - iii. Being a follower of Jesus isn't something one can do up on the tree, keeping our safe distance.
 1. Hearing and following a call from God to walk the talk means change, means commitment
 2. To make the point again, it means going back to basics
 3. And I would argue Jesus clarified "the basics" to be seeing the world through God's eyes:
 - a. Where we are children of God, made in God's image, embraced by God's love always
 - b. Where we care for one another
 - c. Where love means you stretch beyond your comfort zone for the benefit of anyone in need
 4. Jesus knows what these basics can be risky, even dangerous. It requires courage and focus. And he is committed to these basics no matter what the cost.
 - c. Jesus knows our baggage, sees us completely, and nevertheless calls us down from our tree, calls us back to basics, the basics of God's love, forgiveness, and justice. Expect there to be friction around us, but expect also God will equip us to be worthy of the call.

Sources: <https://billloader.com/LkPentecost24.htm>

Reflection questions

1. Share a time when you felt your commitment to follow Jesus took a big step forward.
2. Should Jesus have had dinner with Zacchaeus? Why or why not? (Luke 19:1-10)
3. Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus, but from a distance (up a tree). What “tree” do we have to climb down in order to get closer to Jesus?