

Petersen tells it like this: "Today is salvation day in this home! Here he is: Zacchaeus, son of Abraham! For the Son of Man came to find and restore the lost." So point 1 is that we are learning something about what 'salvation' or 'salvation day' means – salvation does not require, nor result in, perfection. Salvation in this lifetime is not about the end statement – rather is the process, the healing and reconciliation that is needed for creating right relationships within which ordinary compromised, impure and sinful people – like us - can live within, in response to, and toward, the realm of God.

And so salvation comes to Zacc because he is restored to a right relationship within his own people. So Zacchaeus is OK.

Point 2: I bet you didn't then think: so who is getting it in the nose - Petersen translates it like this: 'what business does he have getting cosy with this crook?' Yes, the grumbling crowd, the ones whose attitude is being challenged! They'd been victims, or at least prepared to believe gossip about Zacc, judging him as someone they had learned to distrust without giving credit for the good works Zacc's already done

Then it is reasonable, is it not, to imagine that WE are the crowd and to ask what is the salvation we need to hear and receive from Jesus today?

Who is our Zacchaeus? Who is the person we distrust? Who we do not credit with good works, or give them the dignity to which they were born of being 'one of us'. We are to seek out, find and incorporate within our community the excluded, and the lost, even rich, tax collectors like Zacchaeus. Jesus has not come to judge and condemn, but to seek out and save the lost. Jesus has brought Zacc in from the margin of 'the crowd', to the inside.

What we don't know from the text is the continuing attitude of the third party to the triangle – the criticising 'they'. Like the older brother in chapter 15 after the lost son is welcomed with tears and joy, we are left without an ending – there's our challenge – can we be happy in a community which seeks and saves the lost. AMEN.

Highfield Rd Uniting Church Canterbury

Reflection : Zacchaeus



Vestry Elder: Sue Thompson

Prayers: Beth Horsfield

Music: Cheryl Jenkins

Rev Deacon Jenny Preston

leading the worship and ministry of all the Congregation

REFLECTION—30-10-2022

Let's re-visit what we know about Zacchaeus – whose name means *pure*

⁵⁻⁷When Jesus got to the tree, he looked up and said, “Zacchaeus, hurry down. Today is my day to be a guest in your home.” Zacchaeus scrambled out of the tree, hardly believing his good luck, delighted to take Jesus home with him. Everyone who saw the incident was indignant and grumped, “What business does he have getting cosy with this crook?”

⁸Zacchaeus just stood there, a little stunned. He stammered apologetically, “Master, I give away half my income to the poor—and if I’m caught cheating, I pay four times the damages.

Roddy Hamilton, a Church of Scotland minister, and friend of many UCA people, doesn’t think Zacchaeus got into the tree because he suffered from small man syndrome.

If he was, he’d probably have been used to pushing his way toward the front of the crowd. Rather it was an extravagant act for a dignified person to undertake. He really wanted to see Jesus.

He’d become rich by collecting taxes on behalf of the Roman Empire and his own people saw him as compromised, if not as a traitor and a thief. ‘the crowd’ interpreted him as a ‘sinner’, someone whose behaviour had earned him God’s disapproval and made him unworthy of inclusion in respectable Jewish society.

Brendan Byrne SJ, one of my New Testament lecturers, doesn’t agree with Roddy Hamilton – he thinks Zacc is up the tree because he’s short, and makes this unusually extravagant gesture of climbing and being spotted by people – people who didn’t trust him very much, who would be stunned to see him in the sycamore tree.

David Ewart, another commentator follow, wants us to concentrate on the word ‘chief tax collector’ – the tops of his field – suggesting Zacc probably employed

sub-contractors to collect the taxes – and he is RICH. And David suggests it is quite immodest for Zacc to be in a tree - and putting himself up to be mocked as well as despised and distrusted.

All of these reasons probably would make Jesus interested in this fellow.

The sycamore tree is the biblical tree of life: it is a type of fig, but considered inferior to a true fig.

And our gospel has Jesus honouring Zacc’s outlandish behaviour by announcing he’ll eat at Zacc’s house with him. – a sure sign of social approval.

Oh yes – I’d forgotten to emphasise that Luke puts in the detail about the crowd grumbling about Jesus’ going to Zacc’s house – no matter whether it’s the NRSV we are hearing or from Eugene Petersen’s translation! That’s where we are to get the hint that the crowd are part of the actors in this story – that they have to learn something about the Kingdom living that Jesus is proclaiming –

Certainly Kylie Crabbe & Fran Barber agree with Brendan Byrne – the original text is very clearly in the present tense: Zacc does not say “I will give”, but “I give” – there is no real evidence that he has undergone a conversion – maybe he is not such a bad tax collector after all! And it’s certainly present tense in my Greek inter-linear text too. Brendan points us to thinking about other places in Luke where Luke has written: *today salvation has come to this house*; similarly – when Jesus, in the synagogue in Nazareth tells the people of his village why he has preached as he did saying: I have been sent to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour – and after rolling up the scroll and sitting down, as was the correct thing to do after reading from the scroll for the day – Jesus said: *TODAY, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing* – telling the congregation in Nazareth that he, Jesus, TODAY was revealing that he was the Messiah promised in Isaiah 61: 1-2. And again we hear this phrase in Luke – at the cross: *today you will be with me in paradise!* (Luke 23:43)

So what are we looking at, or rather, what are we hearing from Jesus speaking to Zacc?