

**Sermon: An Encounter with Grace**  
October 31, 2010 Reformation Sunday  
First Presbyterian Church

**10:30am Traditional Worship**  
Rev. Dr. Donald W. Hackett  
Lancaster, PA

*Text: Luke 19: 1-10*

*<sup>1-4</sup>Then Jesus entered and walked through Jericho. There was a man there, his name Zacchaeus, the head tax man and quite rich. He wanted desperately to see Jesus, but the crowd was in his way—he was a short man and couldn't see over the crowd. So he ran on ahead and climbed up in a sycamore tree so he could see Jesus when he came by.*

*<sup>5-7</sup>When 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 cozy with this crook?"*

*<sup>8</sup>Zacchaeus 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."*

*<sup>9-10</sup>Jesus said, "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."*

*Introduction to Zacchaeus*

**I was walking down the street to work thinking to myself,** “Another day, another dollar.” Over the years I have made more than a few dollars in my line of work. You see, I have a network of offices spread out all over the city. Wherever there is money, my employees can be found. At the city gates, downtown at the market, and even right next to the places of worship, I collect money. Lots of money. Now, it is not my money, of course, it is for a foreign government. They provide us with needed public services and protection. They need to be reimbursed for all their trouble. That is where I come in. I collect money from everyone and give most of it to the government. They get their payment and I get mine. It is a nice deal...particularly for me.

**All this wealth comes at a cost.** My family has nothing to do with me though they secretly come to me for money. They call me a traitor. My religious community has labeled me as “a scum and a sinner.” I thought we all were “sinners.” I am a part of the local chamber of commerce, but they have not had me in as a keynote speaker. I could teach them a lot about making money in a recession. I belong to social clubs, but those

friendships are strictly for business. I am well connected, but really all alone. My few friends are at the bar. Misery does love company.

*Scene One – At the Tree*

**Where was I?** Oh, yes. I was walking to work and I saw of people rushing ahead to the city central plaza. Was it a concert? A parade? I asked a boy passing by and he said, “No, it is much better than that! A famous doctor is coming to our town!” Politicians and rock stars are cool, but they are a dime a dozen. But a proven healer? He is coming here today? I have heard of this Dr. Jesus. He is different. I am told he is a great motivational speaker. Wise, but not arrogant. More importantly he has power to touch and heal people. They say he does not make a big show of it like some others. Dr. Jesus does it quietly, behind the scenes, and giving God the glory. I even heard that he is not impressed with the big shots, but rather hang out with common people. *Maybe he would even talk to a person like me.*

**I ran down the street to see if I could get a glimpse of Dr. Jesus.** Everywhere I tried the crowd was three people deep. I could hear people shouting to Jesus and welcoming him to our city. Up ahead I could see the city leaders (head business and religious leaders, members of the city council, and even the chief of police) all loaded with gifts and fruit for their honored guest. The mayor was in the front of the group holding a big key to the city. Talk about a Welcome Wagon! What was I going to do? I am not a big guy. I cannot see over this crowd. Then I saw a tree with big, low hanging branches. I rushed over and pulled myself up and then over to a branch that hung right over the road. I had a fantastic front row seat! Just as I got into position, Jesus and his entourage of followers came right my way.

**I don't know what I was expecting, but I wanted to see Jesus.** Then there he was. He looked just as I imagined...royal, yet plain. Strong, while amazingly humble. Then something happened that I never expected. He stopped right under my branch, looked up, and called me by name. **"Zacchaeus, hurry down. Today is my day to be a guest in your home."** Jesus knows my name? He wants to go to my house?! O my Lord, could this really be happening? I scrambled down, the crowd parted, and I straightened my clothes as I stood before Jesus. He looked me in the eyes. No, he looked deep into my heart. I was embarrassed to think what he might find there. I am not proud of my deceitful, selfish life. I want more than money can offer. I want only what God can give. I want purpose, freedom, and real relationships. I want to live generous and free! Somehow, Jesus saw that.

*Scene Two – At the Home of a Sinner*

**Dr. Jesus went home with me.** Our town is known for its tourism and hospitality. A dozen prominent people were waiting for Jesus to go home with them. Jesus had to risk offending a lot of influential people in order to love me. These powerful people do not forget, they find ways to get revenge. Regardless, Jesus chose to go home with me. I quickly ordered the best food money could buy and as we walked I invited all my partners in crime to join us. We had a party! I was so overwhelmed by this man's acceptance and love for me, I surrendered. I said, "**Master, I give away half my income to the poor—and if have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.**" It is amazing how love can change a person.

**Questions for Us to Ponder Together**

*Scene One – At the Tree*

**Question #1: Why did Zacchaeus want to see Jesus?**

A song has just hit the popular Christian radio airwaves and it called "Something Holy" by Stellar Kart. I think this song hits the nail on the head on what you, I, and Zacchaeus are really looking for.

You say that the well's run dry. And there's no more tears to cry.  
You're searching for something real. To make you feel.  
You know that you're incomplete. A song with a broken beat.  
There's a whole in all our hearts. And there's a reason why!  
[Chorus]  
We were born to be, A part of something holy.  
All of us are restless until we find.  
We were born to be, A part of something holy.  
Bigger than, bigger than You and I. Bigger than all our lives.

**Sooner or later most of us realize that there is more to life than meets the eye.**

Money and success can be good, but they are not what were created for. You and I were created for meaningful, healthy relationships with God and each other. In the context of these relationships, we discover our holy purpose in this world and in the next.

**Question #2: Why did Jesus want to go home with Zacchaeus?**

You would think that Jesus would go with the protocol of the day and go home with the person the town leaders had selected. Not Jesus. His mind on was on something else. He was looking for people who wanted a new life. Jesus is always looking for hearts that are hungry for a new way of living, hearts that are open to God. Do you know someone who is hungry for something more in his or her life? Maybe you are wishing Jesus would come to your house?

*Scene Two – At the Home of a Sinner*

**Question #3: What did this encounter cost Zacchaeus?**

Zacchaeus was overwhelmed by the fact Jesus would want to go home with him.

I think Zacchaeus had believed the lies he was told. Lies like “You are no good.” “You will always be a disappointment.” “Why would anyone want to love you?”

This encounter forced Zacchaeus to give up his defective self image and embrace a new way of seeing himself. Jesus invited Zacchaeus to see himself with the eyes of God. In God’s eyes Zacchaeus is loved and important. God sees Zacchaeus not as an unlovable orphan, but a forgiven and restored child of Abraham. Are you still holding onto an untruth, a false belief about yourself? Were you called or made to feel stupid, dumb, or ugly when you were growing up? God forgive us for the ways we hurt and scar each other. Jesus is inviting you and me to a new way of seeing ourselves. Jesus says do not look in the mirror or your list of accomplishments for your self value. Jesus says, “Look into my eyes and know that I fully love and accept you just the way you are.”

**Some people are surprised that Zacchaeus promised** to give half of his income to the poor and promise to pay back fourfold anyone he may have cheated. I am not surprised. Generous love prompts others to do the same. I think Zacchaeus discovered that he had a greater purpose. His main task in life was not to hoard wealth, but to bless as many people as possible. The same is true for you and me. In our journey in this world, we are to love God and love people in as many wonderful and creative ways as we can each day. That is our purpose. That is our pleasure in Christ.

**Question #4: What did this encounter cost Jesus?**

Jesus knew he is headed to Jerusalem to be arrested and crucified. He was not out to impress people or win their approval. Jesus was here to win back the hearts of every man, woman, and child. He was on a rescue mission to break us free from self-absorbed and destructive lives. Jesus came to die and rise again so death would not be our last memory. This encounter was one of many demonstrations of unexpected love that eventually cost Jesus his very life. That was his plan and that was his pleasure.

**Prayer:** Thank you, Gracious God, that you loved us so much you came to rescue and restore us. Through the story of Zacchaeus, you demonstrate again your desire to live your life of love in and through us. We dedicate ourselves to you today. Work in us by your love and grace so we can follow you and bless the world in Jesus Name. Amen.