

**FROM THE TABLE TO GENEROSITY –  
ABIDING AT THE TABLE OF JESUS**

Sermon written by Martha-Jean Fitch

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TEXT: Luke 19:1-10

Before I begin our message for today – I think it is important to share a word about what is on all our hearts and that is the tragedy of at the Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. It is something that is so hard to comprehend, and I know one question that keeps coming up in all of our conversations – “Why?” What happened in this young man’s life that made him want to do such a horrendous act of violence? Why wasn’t he stopped before so many lives were lost? Why do we continue to hear so many stories of violence and mass shootings? Why? I’m not sure we will ever have all the answers to those questions. But one thing we know for sure is that we are living in a broken world – and sin and evil abound. I truly believe it stems from the enemy who gets into a person’s life and thoughts – the enemy Satan who wants to kill and steal and destroy. But we serve a risen Lord who wants to bring us life and give us victory over death. God is our Good Shepherd who walks with us through the valley of the shadow of death. His was the first heart that was broken as He saw those young lives being taken – and He is weeping with us and close to those who are grieving and broken-hearted. When we cry out to God, He hears us and cares. The Bible says that He is the God of all comfort, who comforts us in in all our troubles.” I also believe that God is a God of transformation and a God of peace. He is wanting to work through us to help create a world, a community, a church – where things like this are less likely to happen – to reach others with the love of Jesus Christ and help transform them from a world of hate and pain to a world of peace and justice and love. Truly, it is a call for us to find ways to share that love and find ways to make peace with our neighbors.

May God surround the families of Uvalde with His love and comfort – as well as those in Ukraine who are facing devastating loss and grief as well.

Let’s pray – O God in Your mercy hear our prayers. Comfort those who grieve and surround the brokenhearted with Your saving grace. Embrace us all living in this uncertain and often frightening world. Draw us to Your light and use us to be your light bearers to this dark world. May Lord have mercy on us all! We pray in Jesus’ name, AMEN

We continue our sermon series: The Table to Generosity by looking today at someone who was truly transformed and made a big difference in his community. And this man is the most unlikely of all people to be considered generous and faithful – but everything changes once you give your heart to Jesus!

Our story comes from the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of Luke. I invite you to open your Bibles and follow along as I read our text for today. This is a familiar story, many of us grew up singing about, as the “wee little man” – but I believe we will see that Zacchaeus became a very big man of faith and generosity – all because of Jesus.

Let’s begin reading, at verse 1 of the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter:

*<sup>1</sup>Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town. <sup>2</sup>There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich.*

Those two verses tell us a lot, right off the bat. Jericho was an oasis town, surrounded by date palms and balsam groves and it exported its products all over the known world. It lay along a caravan trade route – and it was a very busy commercial city.

And Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector for the Roman government of this prosperous city. He was probably one of the most hated men in Jericho. A Jew by birth, he had chosen to work for the Romans – and he was seen as a traitor to his own people. He and his cohort of tax collectors were well known for making themselves rich by gouging their fellow Jews. When the Scripture says “he was wealthy” – we can assume that Zacchaeus was one of the crooked tax collectors who cheated the people and gave only a portion of the taxes to the Romans - keeping a big portion of it for himself.

Somehow or another, Zacchaeus got the word that Jesus was coming to Jericho. I imagine he had heard the stories that were said about this man who was a great teacher and miracle-worker. And so, in verse 3 we hear:

*<sup>3</sup>He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. <sup>4</sup>So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way.*

Now I can really relate to Zacchaeus being short and having trouble seeing over the crowd. But it seems to me that if he had friends or was in good graces with folks in town, they would have made a way for him to stand near the front. But my guess is that they all turned their backs on him and wouldn't let him get a look at Jesus. So, Zacchaeus climbs up a tree. He could get a good look up there at what was happening... and he could be apart from the crowd. You know, you would think that as Jesus walked into town, his would be focused on just the people he could see at eye-level...and that he wouldn't necessarily be looking up in the trees. But sure enough, that's exactly what Jesus does. It is almost as if Jesus was specifically looking for Zacchaeus, up there in the tree. Verse 5 says:

*<sup>5</sup>When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. “Zacchaeus!” he said. “Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today.”*

*<sup>6</sup>Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. <sup>7</sup>But the people were displeased. “He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner,” they grumbled.*

Oh – the crowd can't believe it. Why in the world would Jesus want to go and have a meal at the house of a notorious sinner? What was He thinking?

But look at how Zacchaeus responds – with great excitement and joy! To have the Lord call you by name – and to want to share a meal with you. For Zacchaeus, I believe it meant that he was finally feeling a love and an acceptance from Jesus that he had not from anyone else.

Now the meal at the home of Zacchaeus is not described. The conversation between Jesus and Zacchaeus is not recorded. I would love to know what Jesus said and did – because all of the sudden, we see that Zacchaeus comes out of his house a completely changed man!

Look at verse 8:

<sup>8</sup> *Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, “I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!”*

<sup>9</sup> *Jesus responded, “Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.”*

Wow! What a transformation! Zacchaeus has gone from greedy to generous, from selfish to selfless, from a thieving heart to a thankful heart! If only we knew what Jesus said to Zacchaeus to get him to change. But one thing I think we *can* know: Jesus shared His love with Zacchaeus – the biggest sinner in town – and in that love, Zacchaeus was transformed! Before Zacchaeus sat at the table with Jesus, money had been his king and god. But when Jesus reached out to him and gave him the words of life and love – how could he live for money any more? With the eyes of faith – Jesus became his greatest treasure, his Lord and Master. And with that transformation, Zacchaeus is now known as one of the greatest givers in all of Scripture.

One pastor I read this week Pastor Dale, wonders what the crowds did in response to this new Zacchaeus. He says, “Will they see and believe? Just imagine. People notice his new-found generosity and they ask him, *“What has happened to you? Why the change?”* Zacchaeus responds with a glow on his face, with a big smile, *“I’m in love. I’m in love with Jesus! He has become my Lord and I am His steward! The things that I have, I give to my Lord to use as He desires. And I have seen that He loves the poor, so I choose to give my possessions to the poor.”*

“When Jesus comes into our lives, we can no longer be the same. Are *we* in love with Jesus? If we are, do our words and our works and our behavior speak of our love for Jesus? Do we love Jesus with our lips *and* with our lives? And does our giving reflect our love?

Next Sunday we will be considering those questions, as we prayerfully determine the level of our *own* generosity - as we make our financial commitments to God for the work of mission and ministry at First Christian Church. This will be your opportunity to respond to the love and generosity of God – by being generous with others. It’s a time to declare that you are putting God first in your life, by giving Him your tithe, the first 10% of your income.

And as it has been said, “We ask you to give not because the church has the need, but because we ourselves have a need to give. It’s what brings the greatest joy and blessing in our lives.” And your giving can enable our church to do ministry that changes lives. All of those ministries have a cost – some financial and some personal involvement. Both are important to develop Spirit-filled, committed disciples of Christ. That can only happen through the faithful giving of the church.

I want to share with you a testimony of one person in our church who has really been transformed by the love of Jesus. Rachel Ridgeway knows how she wants to respond to the love of Jesus – and put Him first in her giving. Let's hear her testimony about giving:

#### VIDEO FROM RACHEL

#### INVITATION

God loves us dearly and wants us to put Him first in our lives. Can you make a commitment this day to declare Him Lord and Savior of your life? He is calling you – won't you make a decision today to live for Him and give to others the great love God has given to you?

Today is the day for you to make a decision for Him. Won't you come now – come and share the Lord!

#### RESOURCES

Pastor Dale, *Transformed for Generosity*. First United Methodist Church in Lindstrom, <https://www.lindstrommethodist.org/transformed-for-generosity/>

Peter Wallace, *Day One*, October 31, 2004. [https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/5d9b820ef71918cdf2002575/changed\\_from\\_a\\_taker\\_to\\_a\\_giver](https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/5d9b820ef71918cdf2002575/changed_from_a_taker_to_a_giver)

Steve DeWitt, “*Money, a Little Man and Jesus – Living a Generous Life*”, Bethel Church in Northwest, Indiana. <https://www.thejourney.fm/articles/2020/12/3/money-a-little-man-and-jesus>