

Luke 19: 1-10

He entered Jericho and was passing through it.

A man was there named Zacchaeus;

he was a chief tax-collector and was rich.

He was trying to see who Jesus was,

but on account of the crowd he could not,

because he was short in stature.

So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him,

because he was going to pass that way.

When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him,

‘Zacchaeus, hurry and come down;

for I must stay at your house today.’

So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him.

All who saw it began to grumble and said,

‘He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.’

Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord,

‘Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor;

and if I have defrauded anyone of anything,

I will pay back four times as much.’

Then Jesus said to him,

‘Today salvation has come to this house,

because he too is a son of Abraham.

For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.

Meditation:

Last year a little book entitled “The life changing magic of Tidying up” was all the rage...
It was a tiny little book that encouraged its readers to keep only what “sparked joy”
and to get rid of the rest.

Now...that isn't my typical attitude when cleaning out my closet.
Typically I begin by chastising myself for having so many tee shirts and sweaters...
then I take a deep breath, try to figure out what I could give away,
I would then quickly put it in the give away bag...
and then quickly take to the resale shop so I wouldn't change my mind
and hang it up back in my closet...

But there is an inherent problem with that approach...
it was all about what I could do without rather than what I wanted to live with
It was more of a negative, sacrificial attitude...
rather than a positive, grateful attitude...
Two totally different mindsets.

and I think that is how a lot of us approach our spiritual lives as well....
I know that is the way I used to think
Somewhere along the way I picked up the belief
that living a spiritual life wouldn't be any fun...
that I wouldn't get to do what I really want to do...
That doing God's will would be a sacrifice...
but...you know... that's ok!
because getting to heaven later and was a whole lot better
than enjoying this life now...
or so I had been taught...

Gratefully I have come to understand that those beliefs are so not true...

but sadly, in the many conversations that I have had with others
I realize that I'm not the only one who thought...or thinks...
that following the a spiritual path takes all the fun out of life
and one becomes bored and boring ...

In today's reading Zaccheus is anything but bored...

He's running to see Jesus...

He hurries up and down the tree...

and he's happy to welcome Jesus into his home...

and...importantly...He willingly donates half of his riches to the poor
and goes way beyond what is required of him by either Jewish or Roman law
to pay back anyone he has cheated ...

This guy is all in with Jesus

and he is THRILLED!

Note: Zacchaeus isn't mourning the loss of his money...

he is celebrating his freedom from the burden of all of his ill gotten gain...

and he's celebrating his reunion with his community.... his people

He is once again being recognized as a son of Abraham

and no longer talked about and feared as a traitor to his people....

We can presume that Zacchaeus heard about Jesus' teachings...

that he heard about God's unconditional love, forgiveness and compassion

and so as Jesus enters Zacchaeus home town...

Zacchaeus wants to see this guy who is sharing all this almost unbelievably good news..

he wants to hear for himself what Jesus is saying

and so he hurries through the crowd

and finds a vantage point to watch the Rabbi walk by...

Jesus spots him and tells him that he MUST stay at his house today...

Whoa!

Can't you just imagine how Zacchaeus must have felt?

The surprise! the excitement...the thrill...

but then the people start to snicker and whisper..

ha! we always knew Jesus wasn't the real deal...

why is he going to the home of a that traitor! that thief!

Zacchaeus knows what they are saying, so he says to Jesus so that all can hear:

'Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor;

and if I have defrauded anyone of anything,

I will pay back four times as much.'

Zacchaeus does not offer restitution begrudgingly

he isn't cringing at the thought of giving up his excess...

No! he is freely and enthusiastically turns his life around...

he joyfully moves towards the Love of God

and as a natural consequence,

he enthusiastically leaves behind anything which takes him away from it...

That movement is hugely important.

When we can move towards something...

it is so much easier to leave what is not needed or not helpful behind...

On a personal level, since I moved into ministry here at The Center,

I have had some people question me why I left the Catholic Church...

a lot of people assumed that I just tired or angry or frustrated and just

decided to leave the Church...

**While it is true, I did feel all those things at times...
that isn't why I left...**

**I left because I received the invitation to share God's love here at The Center...
It wasn't so much a matter of moving away from the Church
but a moving towards God's invitation of love...
Does that make sense?**

**When we moved towards God's love,
it is so much easier for us to let go of whatever is keeping us from Love
be it giving or receiving love...**

**When we move towards God's forgiveness for ourselves ...
then hanging on to old resentments and grudges doesn't matter so much..
then we find it easier to forgive others...
even...sometimes...the resentments and grudges just 'disappear'...
it's like you don't even have to try to forgive...**

**When we move towards God's compassion towards us...
we find it easier to be more compassionate towards others...
and we find ourselves being more generous with our time and our resources...
we no longer have to tell ourselves we SHOULD donate...
we find that we want to be more generous and share what we have with
those who are in need...**

**When we move towards and into God's love for us...
Love naturally overflows from our hearts towards others...
then we naturally find ourselves looking for ways that we can
love those who appear unloveable...**

I know these things to be true...

I cannot rationally explain it...

All I know that in the old days,

I used to try to be good...

and it was hard and not fun....

These days, I certainly do not claim any perfection...

but even living with my limitations, struggles and imperfections,

I'm much easier on myself...and others...

and for that, I can only say, "Thank you". Amen