

ST. MARY OF NAZARETH /ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI – WEST WICKHAM
9th August 2020: Ninth Sunday after Trinity

Reading: Luke 19:1-10

Jesus was going through Jericho, ² where a man named Zacchaeus lived. He was in charge of collecting taxes and was very rich. ³⁻⁴ Jesus was heading his way, and Zacchaeus wanted to see what he was like. But Zacchaeus was a short man and could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree.

⁵ When Jesus got there, he looked up and said, “Zacchaeus, hurry down! I want to stay with you today.” ⁶ Zacchaeus hurried down and gladly welcomed Jesus.

⁷ Everyone who saw this started grumbling, “This man Zacchaeus is a sinner! And Jesus is going home to eat with him.”

⁸ Later that day Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “I will give half of my property to the poor. And I will now pay back four times as much to everyone I have ever cheated.”

⁹ Jesus said to Zacchaeus, “Today you and your family have been saved, because you are a true son of Abraham. ¹⁰ The Son of Man came to look for and to save people who are lost.”

TALK:

Last time I did the talk for a service, I was reflecting on healing and how God provides healing through Jesus when we recognise ourselves in a place of conflict, or only seeing scarcity, or thinking of ourselves instead of others, and then we make a commitment to do better and to find peace and abundance in the future.

This week I want to continue this healing theme, by looking firstly at the word salvation, or being saved, which is what Jesus told Zacchaeus had happened in verse 9 of our reading.

In medieval times, healing ointments were called salves. These were creams made with herbs, oils and fats. Although the formula has changed, the name –

or variations of it – can be still found. For example, there's a brand of ointment sold today, used for scratches, stings, etc. called Savlon™. There's another variation of the word, often used to describe those who are sent to retrieve the remains of a shipwreck or a car crash, and those who look to reuse or recycle the materials brought back. This is known as salvage.

Salve and salvage are both words that mean rescue. Sometimes we say that we salve our conscience by doing a good deed or giving a present, which means we save or rescue – or heal – our conscience. We make it feel better. We make it better. Salve, salvage – and salvation: they all have the same underlying meaning.

It is, our reading says, what Jesus brought to Zacchaeus and his household. Zacchaeus was healed and rescued. Before Jesus arrived in town, Zacchaeus was the unacceptable rich person of his day – he had money but no respectability – I wonder who might be the equivalent today? Jesus turns things inside out and does the last thing that anyone expected: Jesus chose to speak to Zacchaeus and to visit his home. He chose to honour Zacchaeus before Zacchaeus had said or done anything – certainly before he had shown any repentance or amendment of life. How do you react to the idea that Jesus talked to someone like this and went to their house, rather than to the home of someone religious, someone respectable?

Let me take you into Zacchaeus' mind, so that we can think about how this all felt to him:

My name is Zacchaeus. I am very rich - when I want something, I just send a servant out for it. I'm a tax collector – well, actually, I'm the chief tax collector for Jericho. I want to tell you about the day that Jesus came to town.

That day I came out onto the street myself because I wanted to see this teacher, Jesus.

I wanted to see him because I had heard that he was special – tough on religious people but friends with tax collectors like me. But the crowd was very big and I'm not very tall, and there was no way they were going to let me through to the front where I would have been able to see.

So I gave up and climbed a tree. It was quite tricky, but I got settled in the branches, up out of everyone's way. Most people didn't even know that I was there. I thought to myself, I've got the perfect view up here – I can just watch this teacher and see what he does, see what I think of him.

I waited for a while, and then people began moving and calling out: 'Here he is! Here he is! The Teacher's coming!' He was quite hard to spot in the crowd – but then I saw him – he was bending down talking to a child. The child smiled. The men near the Teacher were frowning and trying to get the Teacher to move on, but he took no notice and carried on talking to the child. Strange thing for an important man to do!

The next moment, though, he did something even stranger – he straightened up and looked right up into my tree! I could see him asking one of the important men of Jericho,

'Who is that, sitting in the tree?'

The important man squinted upwards, shading his eyes. He recognised me, and gave Jesus his answer. 'That'll be the end of it,' I thought. But no. Jesus came right over and stood underneath my tree. Now everybody was looking up at me. It was embarrassing.

Jesus said,

'Come on, Zacchaeus, come down from there! I must stay at your house today!'

My house? Well, imagine how you would feel if all your best birthdays happened at once – that was how I felt, so happy and proud. The Teacher had honoured me, in front of everyone. I hurried down from the tree.

People began to mutter. They didn't like what Jesus was doing at all. I could hear words like 'sinner' and I knew they were talking about me. But I wasn't about to let anything spoil this moment – Jesus was coming to my house – so I called out, 'I will give half my money to the poor and, if I have cheated anyone out of their money, I will pay back four times as much.'

Everybody went quiet. Then Jesus came closer and said.

'God has come close to you today. You are as much a part of God's family as anybody else.'

What can I say? He changed my life.

So, you see, this story is about a life-changing personal encounter. Zacchaeus was rescued from loneliness. Rescued from poor self-image. He was healed by Jesus' friendship. As a result of feeling better – of being made better – Zacchaeus gave away half of his possessions and paid back the money he had taken from others four times over. This healed him further; Zacchaeus had salved his own conscience. Salvation came to Zacchaeus and his household. Jesus' care for Zacchaeus was like a salve that brought immense healing to someone who had previously been lonely and mean.

I wonder what healing Jesus can bring to you today. Now, you might not think of yourself as someone who needs the kind of healing that Zacchaeus did, but we can all change through being befriended by someone who really shows care for us. It's also possible that God might want to use you in being a friend to someone else. Think about it. How can you change a life – whether that be your own, in accepting the friendship that's offered by Jesus, or someone else's life, by showing care and concern for someone that you wouldn't normally give any attention to. Following our Black Lives Matter meeting last month, it was suggested that we might look at joining the network of Inclusive Church, which recognises that there are many groups of people who have been excluded from churches, albeit unintentionally in many cases. How can we look out for those who are different to us and find a way that Jesus can help us to get to know them and include them in God's kingdom, just as he did for Zacchaeus?

This is what Jesus is all about – bringing salvation, changing all lives for the better.

Amen