

SERMON KRIJTBERG SATURDAY, OCTOBER 29th 2022
on Luke 19, 1 – 10
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Saint Luke, my dear friends, who's gospel we follow this year week after week, is a real storyteller. It is a shame that we never read a longish part of his gospel, a chapter or two at a time, instead of hearing every Sunday just a short episode, taken out of its context. The story of Zacchaeus, which we just heard, is not an event on its own. It is part of Jesus' long journey towards Jerusalem, where He and his followers will face the climax of Jesus' life, his final days, his suffering and death on the cross.

What happened before the Zacchaeus episode? A rich young man approached Jesus, wanting to know what he had to do to win eternal life. Jesus tells him that he should get rid of his riches and distribute them among the poor. But hearing that, the young man, who was a lovely, good, open, outgoing and godfearing guy, feels overwhelmed. He cannot do it, and filled with sadness he left Jesus. And Jesus is disappointed.

Jesus and his disciples continue their journey towards Jerusalem and reach Jericho. Sitting at the citygate is a blind man begging for alms. He might be physically blind, but he sees what others do not see: that this son of David is the longed for Messiah. He starts shouting: 'Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me'. He is heard and healed.

And now we enter Jericho. That is where a lonely taxcollector lives, who desperately wants to see who Jesus is. He has created an impenetrable wall around himself. He was small and was looked upon with contempt by the citizens of Jericho. His name was Zacchaeus, what ironically means: 'the just one'. He had to collect the taxes for the Romans, the hated occupying forces, and probably he was pretty corrupt himself, rich and lonely. But here a breakthrough happens. Jesus, lovingly uses the breach that Zacchaeus offers by climbing in that tree wanting to see Jesus. Zacchaeus makes the first move. He climbs up the tree, and obviously making a fool of himself is seen by Jesus. "Zacchaeus, come down from your tree. I want to be the guest of your house and share your food tonight."

And down comes Zacchaeus. For once he has been seen. He is called by his name. He was known by this Jesus and acknowledged to be worth while. He had wanted to see who Jesus was, but Jesus already had seen who Zacchaeus was. At that moment the walls of Jericho came tumbling down once again. The wall the people had built around Zacchaeus to shut him out as their enemy. The wall Zacchaeus had built around himself to keep the hatred of his neighbors out. Jesus reduced that wall to dust by his simple affirming words: "Zacchaeus, show yourself, will you be my host tonight?" Not only does Zacchaeus climb down before the eyes of all the people of Jericho, but freed inside he finds it in himself to acknowledge his wrongdoings and to whole-heartedly repair the damage he had made.

Saint Luke in his gospel shows himself an accomplished storyteller. In one day of Jesus' fateful journey to Jerusalem he reports on two meetings. Two rich young men wanting to see Jesus. The first one knows that he has kept all the commandments of the law from his earliest days till now. But somehow he is not completely content. There is something missing. What must I do to live a really fulfilled life? He probably expects to be set another

task, but the task Jesus suggested was not what he had expected. Jesus acknowledged his positive way of life. He looked at him lovingly and even invites him to follow Him on his way. But there is one thing you lack: "Sell all that you own and distribute the money among the poor! Then come and follow me!" Now all he owned turned out to be an impenetrable wall around his life, a wall that even Jesus' invitation could not breach. In all his perfection he could not find the freedom to open up to his neighbors, to the poor.

His counterpart is a man who had not too much time for God's law. But once he found the affirmation of who he was, instead of the disapproval of what he did, he felt liberated by Jesus. "Look sir, he said, I am going to give half of my property to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody I will pay him back four times the amount." The first one went away sad. All his riches could not bring him joy and fulfillment. The other gave away what had been a burden all along and joyfully welcomed Jesus in his house.

Now there certainly remain some questions to look into in this story.

Why did Jesus have to stay in Zacchaeus' house? Obviously not because he was so good. I think he is a model for each of us. He is a sinner like all of us. We often do what we should not do, or we omit to do what we know we should do. We usually are full of good intentions, but somehow they just do not seem to materialize. God seems to want to work with those kind of people. He keeps on offering us occasions for conversion. Today, He says, I want to be in your house. All it needs is hearing his voice and acting upon his invitation. Come down from your tree! Open up!

The first rich young man heard the voice loud and clear. But he closed the door and went away saddened. You are invited today to listen to God's voice speaking to your heart. What is it you need to free yourself from? What is it that burdens you? Open up, and share Zacchaeus' joy. Amen.