

Luke 18:31-19:10 Narrative Lectionary 074: Zacchaeus
17 March 13

“What It Means to Jesus to Be Messiah”

Last year church council said that our two chief aims at this point in the life of our parish were to work at building relationships with God and each other and at spiritual renewal. This year's council re-affirmed these priorities. This church in the round which we will experience again today is part of my effort to contribute to these essential goals. Most of our talk on Sunday morning is on the chit-chat level, which is necessary but not sufficient. Today we'll get a chance to talk to each other about how we hear God is addressing us through the Bible. I hope you find this helpful. Next week we'll go back to our regular format. The plan right now is to do church in the round once a month, but that depends on in large part on what kind of feedback we get. So please let Liz Sheffey, Kim Donnelly, Barry Deemer, Ann Huck, Judy Hurd, Bill Moore, or Bart Rader know if this type of sermon format is helpful to you.

It is perhaps unfortunate that we call the first part of today's reading a passion prediction. I think it's better to think of it as Jesus saying what it means to be the Messiah. Jesus has set his face towards Jerusalem where he will act on what he says. Next week we'll hear that story. Today Jesus tells us what it means to be Messiah, and then he shows us.

The Scripture is read.

31Then he took the twelve aside and said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. 32For he will be handed over to the Gentiles; and he will be mocked and insulted and spat upon. 33After they have flogged him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise again." 34But they understood nothing about all these things; in fact, what he said was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.

35As he approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. 36When he heard a crowd going by, he asked what was happening. 37They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." 38Then he shouted, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 39Those who were in front sternly ordered him to be quiet; but he shouted even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 40Jesus stood still and ordered the man to be brought to him; and when he came near, he asked him. 41What do you want me to do for you? He said, "Lord, let me see again." 42Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has saved you." 43Immediately he regained his sight and followed him, glorifying God; and all the people, when they saw it, praised God.

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. 2A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. 3He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. 4So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. 5When 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." 6So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. 7All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." 8Zacchaeus 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." 9Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. 10For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

Since Jesus is moving toward the city in a large crowd of pilgrims we need little imagination to sense a mood of excitement and expectation. But the expectation of many seems to have been that Jesus would be crowned king, not that he would be crucified. Even afterwards, many denied that Jesus actually died. Some said Simon of Cyrene was mistakenly crucified instead of Jesus; other that the vinegar offered to Jesus contained a drug and he only appeared to be dead; and so the stories went. Today denials take the form of huge Easter services without acknowledgment of Good Friday. So it's not surprising that Luke notes, "But they understood none of these things; this saying was hid from them, and they did not grasp what was said." As a first reflection question I invite you to consider, "What does it mean to me that Jesus is my Messiah?"

Time for reflection and sharing.

But then right after the part about, "they understood none of these things," Luke tells two stories that demonstrates Jesus' power to open the eyes of the blind. The first story is about a man whose eyes are blind. Jesus opens them, and immediately the man responds by following Jesus and glorifying God.

The other man whose eyes are opened, this time figuratively, is Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector, a collaborator with the oppressor. I can't imagine people liked taxes back then any more than they do today. But Zacchaeus was not only a tax collector but a tax collector for the foreigners who occupied their land. The taxes he collected supported the Roman army. No wonder no one would let him through to see Jesus. You know the story. Zacchaeus runs ahead and climbs a tree so he can see this man who is reputed to be the friend of sinners. And it turns out to be true! Jesus does what no other self-respecting Jew in Jericho would do; he enters Zacchaeus' house and has table fellowship with him. Radical, amazing grace. And Zacchaeus' eyes are opened. Jesus sees a stray in the wilderness who, despite what everyone else thought, was still a child of Abraham. And through Jesus' eyes Zacchaeus sees how far he has wandered, and he comes home. Last week Jesus told a story of dire warning about a rich man. This week Jesus deals with a real rich man and does so with radical, amazing grace.

The first blind man responded by following Jesus and praising God. This second blind man responds by acting like a child of Abraham, going way beyond what the law required, giving half of his possessions to the poor and restoring four-fold any ill-gotten gains. And Jesus says, "Today salvation has come to this house." Yes, with God all things are possible: the camel goes through the eye of the needle; the rich are saved. The second reflection question today is, "What response does God's radical, amazing grace elicit from me?"

Time for reflection and sharing.

I began the service today saying that what we're after in this church is spiritual renewal. Here today are two stories of how God's amazing grace can renew, restore, re-make blind, lost sinners into fully restored children of God. The Son of Man came to seek out and save the lost. That's our Messiah.