

Know who you are

Almighty and merciful God, it is only by your gift that your faithful people offer you true and laudable service: Grant that we may run without stumbling to obtain your heavenly promises; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Collect for Proper 26, The Book of Common Prayer, page 235

THE 24TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (LECTIONARY: PROPER 26C)

Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4, Psalm 119:137-144, 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12, Luke 19:1-10

October 30, 2016

ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

THE REV. RANDALL C.K. DAY, D.MIN., PRIEST AND RECTOR

THE GOSPEL READING: LUKE 19:1-10

Jesus 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."

In this story of the chief tax collector Zacchaeus and Jesus we see both the first *and* second coming of Christ.

The story is well-known, this short man, short, as well, on regard in his community because he is a tax-collector, the chief tax collector, enriched by colluding with the occupying Roman Empire, enriched by keeping a percentage

of his neighbor's tax payments for himself – and probably getting payments from all the other tax collectors as well.

Jesus is passing through Jericho, one of the oldest inhabited cities in the world, then, as now, a border town, contested territory – neither, comfortably, Israel, his home territory, but not distant from it, verging into the whole of

the gentile world. Jesus, on his journey to Jerusalem and his own betrayal and death – so on his own margin between all that has been and all that will be lost.

Zacchaeus wants to see Jesus and no one is going to help him do that. So, desperate, he risked the ludicrous act of climbing a tree to catch a glimpse.

What no one had imagined was: Jesus wanted to see Zacchaeus.

So the unimaginable happened.

Jesus not only sees Zacchaeus but in front of the grumbling, increasingly hostile crowd, calls him by name, calls him to himself, and says he is coming to his home to share hospitality with him.

Zacchaeus launches into a description of either how generous he is or how generous he will be in the future, but that has nothing to do with how Jesus views Zacchaeus.

In the view of Jesus, he simply is a child of God.

He is simply beloved.

As you are. As I am. As everyone is. (As the grumbling crowd was.)

Which, as I have said before,

is the point of the sign outside our door – about the doors being open for people of all faiths and none – which is not a statement of fuzzy liberalism but is, instead, a recognition of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, that no one is outside God's grace and compassion – no matter what may be going on in their minds at one moment or another.

And so, the unimaginable happens in Jesus going to Zacchaeus's home, sitting at his table, being his guest.

Earlier, I said that in this story we see both the first and second coming of Christ.

In his recent meditations, Fr. Richard Rohr has been focused on the nature of Christ which, he points out, is more a metaphysical or mystical concept than a religious one. "Christ" is not Jesus's last name. You could almost put a comma after Jesus – as: Jesus, Christ or say: Jesus, who fully embodied and expressed the Christ Spirit.

I referred to Jesus as the *first* coming of Christ, though that Spirit-of-God's-anointing-reality-in-compassion is at the heart of creation itself and sustains the whole of creation, what we know

and don't know of it, what we see and what is beyond our sight – so, there is a foundation for what God is *reasserting* in Jesus's being in the world – and that was *not*, of all things, an alternative religion.

Fr. Richard says: “whenever the material and the spiritual coincide, there is the Christ.”

Jesus, in his embrace of Zacchaeus, is saying that no one is outside God-given spiritual reality, that the material and the spiritual coincide in all people... and God delights and persists in this essential experience and expression of God's own self beyond our grumbling, our divisions, our hostility, our destruction of self or others, our failures, our losses – even the loss of our own lives.

Fr. Richard points out the fact that our gathering in the Eucharist week by week is not just a routine or a habit of our particular community of faith – fulfilling some dull obligation or going through a repetitive motion. It is like Zacchaeus and Jesus sitting at the table in Zacchaeus's home – the material world and the divine or sacred actually come together, meet, become whole.

Fr. Richard quotes one of St.

Augustine's best-known sayings about the Eucharist or Communion: “Behold what you are; become what you receive.” Or: “eat it and know what you are.”

Christ is really present in the Eucharist – the fullness of Spirit in the substance of bread and wine – in this corporate, sacramental action and our participation in it. Anglicans, as I'm sure you know, don't miss the point by becoming overly concerned about the molecular constitution of consecrated bread or wine, though we know the presence is really real in ways we can grasp and in ways that will come to us later.

And it does take years of weeks for this fullness of reality to settle in for us – perhaps a lifetime.

All the time, the Christ Mystery, the presence of God in everything and in everyone is ever-expanding in creation and in the world.

And thus, the second coming of Christ in Zacchaeus and in you and in me...

When Jesus saw Zacchaeus he said: “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I *must* stay at your house today.”

It seems neither Jesus nor Zacchaeus had a choice.

Fr. Richard says: “You and I are living here in this ever-expanding universe. You and I are a part of this Christ Mystery without any choice on our part. We just are, whether we like it or not. It’s nothing we have to consciously believe. It’s first of all announcing an objective truth. But if we consciously take this mystery as our worldview, it creates immense joy and peace. It gives us significance and belonging as part of God’s Great Work. We are no longer alienated from God, others, or the universe. Everything belongs. And it is pure, undeserved gift from the very beginning.”

We have this radical, elemental, essential connection: we are, as Jesus said of Zacchaeus, children of God – no matter how we are experiencing life in a moment or a season of our lives – no matter our stature – how short or how tall – or our standing among those in our society or culture, no matter how young or old or any other characteristic.

With this realization, however dim, however fleeting, as a community of faith and as individuals, how shall we live?

Expressing Christ’s coming again and again in our lives and in

the world, the possibilities are truly endless.



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