

Sermon For October 30, 2016 - "Called Into Relationship, Called Into Justice"

Twenty-fourth Sunday After Pentecost
Reformation Sunday
October 30, 2016
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

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"Called Into Relationship, Called Into Justice"

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Imagine being Zacchaeus that day. He's short, he's a despised tax collector working for the oppressive Roman power, he has stolen from his neighbors. When he goes out in public, does he hope to escape notice, does he want to hide from the angry stares?

That day, somehow, he knows he needs to see Jesus. Things are not right in his life. He needs to see Jesus. So he runs ahead of the crowd and climbs up into a tree - such an undignified thing to do. The tree gives Zacchaeus a view, but is he hoping he can stay hidden and just take stock of Jesus from afar? Then Jesus stops in front of him, pokes his head up through the branches of the tree, and calls Zacchaeus by name and says, "Hurry, come down, I want to be in your home, I want to be with you." Jesus calls Zacchaeus out of his safe perch into a feast. And, this feast of Jesus' love leads Zacchaeus to embrace God's grace and God's justice. Zacchaeus commits himself to justice - to sharing his wealth with the poor and making reparations to all those he has defrauded.

Salvation, a reorientation of life towards God, happens for Zacchaeus as Jesus draws Zacchaeus out into relationship with God. The relationship is so gracious as to be unbearable apart from joyful repentance and release of all he has been hoarding. As Zacchaeus is drawn out, he awakens to the reality that he has participated in both systemic and personal injustice. He is part of the massive, oppressive Roman tyranny and he has personally made dishonest choices. Zacchaeus commits himself to systemic justice through relinquishment, or the sharing of his wealth with the poor. He moves toward personal justice by making reparations to the individuals he has betrayed.

Today, we too need to see Jesus. Our lives are not as we hope they would be. Things are not right with us. We do not live in God's ways of justice and mercy. We need to see Jesus. Yet, part of us would also like to stay at a safe distance, taking in everything from afar. So today, Jesus comes to us as he came to Zacchaeus. He invites himself into our lives and our homes. He calls us into a feast of love.

Granted, we won't see Jesus of Nazareth's piercing, compassionate eyes; we won't see those particular arms held open in welcome. but Jesus comes to us still. Jesus is the living Word of God: the Word that is still at work in our world, the Word that transformed Martin Luther and inspired the Reformation, the Word that still has the power to draw us into relationship with God, again and again. Jesus, the Word, comes to us as words of

scripture are read, preached, shared and sung among us today. We see Jesus as two or three are gathered together. We see Jesus in the faces of the least and the lowly throughout our world.

Jesus comes and calls out our name and says, "Come down, I want to be with you." Jesus draws us each into a gracious relationship of salvation - into a reorientation of our life towards God, a reorientation that we need over and over each day. As we experience this again and again, like Zacchaeus, we long for our lives to reflect more of the love and the welcome that we ourselves have received. We feel compelled to examine our lives, learn to release our hold on things, and to commit to God's mercy justice. And, Jesus meets us in these desires to continually draw us out, to continually reorient us towards God, to continually save us.

Today, we need to see Jesus and he is here. So come let us eat with Jesus. But first, let's rest a moment in the love and welcome Jesus gives us.

Amen.