

Sermon for Sunday, October 27, 2019 - "No More Hustling"

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
Reformation Sunday
October 27, 2019
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

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

When I hear this story, I picture Zacchaeus as Danny DeVito, that short actor who often plays sketchy, dishonest types. Somehow DeVito makes these characters appear sympathetic. He helps us relate to them.

Zacchaeus is definitely a sketchy guy. He's grown rich collecting taxes for the Roman Empire, which means he's charging his neighbors too much and pocketing the extra. Ancient tax collectors are not sympathetic characters.

Yet picture Zacchaeus as Danny DeVito and it might help you relate to him. Or, just hear his story again and notice how much it has in common with ours.

Zacchaeus hears that Jesus is passing through his town - just passing through mind you, not staying for a while. Something big, exciting and potentially life changing is coming and Zacchaeus is afraid it's just going to pass him by.

We can relate to that feeling. We know what it is to worry that we're going to miss out on something important - that life, healing, and hope are just going to pass us by.

Zacchaeus doesn't want to miss out. So, he tries to get some face time with Jesus, but the crowd gets in his way.

We know what that feels like, too. There are so many obstacles that keep us from what we most need - the press of people, demands, noise, busyness. The crowd gets in the way.

Zacchaeus wants to see Jesus but he's coming up short. So, he hustles to outrun the crowd and scrambles up a tree. That's totally a Danny DeVito move - doing something undignified and potentially dangerous to get in on the action. Yet we also know what it's like to feel we're coming up short. We know the pressure to scramble, hustle and climb, to get ahead of it all. And when we're panicked about getting passed over or missing out, we, too, can find ourselves in some ridiculous, perilous positions

That's where Jesus finds Zacchaeus; that's where Jesus finds us. We'd like for Jesus to see us at our Sunday best - calm, collected, dignified. We don't want him to see us when we're rushing and crazy and scrambling to keep up with it all. We'd prefer to appear more like Morgan Freeman and less like Danny DeVito.

Yet Jesus finds Zacchaeus. Jesus finds us where we are - even when we're just barely hanging on from a perilous perch.

Jesus looks at Zacchaeus, and at us, and says, "Hurry and come down. You who've done so much scrambling, hustling and climbing, come quickly now to me. You who've worked yourself up to such a state, come down to me. I'm not going to pass you by, I'm going to stay at your house, I will be with you."

Zacchaeus hurries down and welcomes Jesus.

Just as soon as he's down, the noise of the crowd starts up again. People grumble and complain - this sinful tax collector is not worthy of Jesus' attention. But strikingly, Zacchaeus is done trying to outmaneuver them all. Jesus has come to stay with Zacchaeus and that has changed everything.

We're told, "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.'" He stands there, stands firm, and says, in essence, I'm done with hustling people and climbing and trying to get ahead. I don't need all that now. I can let that go. I can let many of my possessions go. I have what I need. I can act in ways that will lead to real life-giving relationships with others.

Jesus' presence has given Zacchaeus a new way of being - a way that is generous and hopeful. Jesus' presence also helps Zacchaeus to stand fast in this new way of being, even when others grumble about him. Beloved, Jesus has also come to stay with us, with you. The risen Jesus is present with us always by the power of the Spirit.

Jesus meets us here today in bread and wine, in word and song, in the gathered community and those the world sees as the last and least.

Jesus finds us wherever we are and says, "I see you and I want to be with you." In him, the God of the universe is present with us to forgive us, to love us and feed us.

Jesus finds us in the midst of all the worries, fear, demands and press of daily life to say I am here, come down, breathe, stand still for a moment. You have what you need. You can pause and rest and open your hands to others.

Since Jesus is with us, we have all that we need to let go of hurry and worry, hustle and scramble. We can live in ways that lead to life-giving relationships with others and with the earth.

This is the good news that Jesus brings, the good news that we celebrate on Reformation Sunday. It's the good news on which we can stand firm like Zacchaeus, like Martin Luther the Reformer, like the saints before us.

Jesus is here to stay with you. You have all that you need.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.