

Sermon for Sunday, October 30, 2022
Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost
Reformation and Affirmation of Baptism Sunday
“Seen, Loved, Found”
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Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

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

Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus, but the crowd got in the way. What gets in the way for you? What prevents you from seeing the love and presence of God made known in Jesus?

Over the years and in the faith statements they wrote this fall, our confirmands identified things that can get in the way for so many of us: anxiety, busyness, arguments about scripture and God, not being able to physically see God, questions, fears. What gets in your way? Zacchaeus climbed a tree to see Jesus. What helps you to see Jesus, to recognize that God is at work in the world?

Interestingly, the very questions and concerns that are sometimes obstacles, can also help us to see more clearly. They can be the tree that gives us a fuller picture of Jesus. This has happened for the four of you. You’ve asked big things in class and in your faith statements: How do we know God is real? How do I know God is listening? What does God actually do? Am I enough? Is God there even when I can’t see God, even when I don’t feel close to God, like I do at camp, or when I’m singing?

As you’ve paid attention to these questions, you’ve experienced God in so many ways. Now you’re able to make these beautiful affirmations that come directly from your faith statements: I believe God will always be there for me and love me through everything; I love God because he’s always there for me and I can trust him never to leave; I’ve been a witness to God’s actions and endeavors; There are so many things I am thankful for, and I have God to thank for them.

Sometimes we’re told we shouldn’t doubt, shouldn’t struggle with faith and life; or, if we do, that we should keep it quiet. We should look like we have it all figured out, that we’ve got it all together. Zacchaeus didn’t look like that, though, as he raced to see Jesus. Men in his time didn’t run in public. They definitely didn’t climb trees. They were supposed to look dignified and competent and stay firmly on the ground. But Zacchaeus didn’t let that stop him from scurrying ahead of the crowd and scrambling up a tree.

I hope you always do the things that help you to know and love Jesus, even if that means you’re out of step with the crowd. I hope you know that questions and struggles don’t mean you’re doing things wrong. Instead, those are the parts of life that often open us to God’s love and presence even more. I also hope you keep noticing how and where you experience God and keep sharing that. Your witness helps us all to pay attention to where we experience God, to how Jesus is still at work in our world.

Like Zacchaeus, you’ve experienced God in the trees, in nature at Camp Ewalu, as you run the cross-country trails, as you spend time enjoying God’s creation. You’ve also seen God through

other people. You say: One thing I love about God is how there are always other people around for me to engage with and love God with; I feel God's energy among all the nice, faithful people of the church; I see God in church in all the friendliness of God's people as they care for each other and are bound together by something bigger than themselves. You've experienced God as your parents have marked you with the cross of Christ each night before bed and in the love of your extended family. You've also experienced Jesus' presence by serving others. You describe sharing your gifts in church choir and in packing food for hungry kids, caring for people on your cross-country team, helping others at camp and at school, using your gifts to be courageous and help others on the journey that is life.

I hope you keep running, climbing trees, asking questions, and noticing Jesus' presence and love. I hope you keep using your gifts to serve others. But no matter what you do or don't do, remember that you are God's beloved child, always. Nothing can change that.

As it was for Zacchaeus, it is for us all. Zacchaeus had done some bad things; like all of us, he was a sinner. Zacchaeus did some admirable things too. He went out on a limb to see Jesus and promised to make amends for his sins. But none of that is what mattered most to Jesus. What mattered to Jesus is that Zacchaeus was a son of Abraham, a beloved child of God. Nothing he did or didn't do could ever change that. When Jesus saw Zacchaeus up in that tree, he called him by name and let Zacchaeus know I want to be with you, I want to share a meal with you. You are loved. You are saved. You are found.

Keaton, Oliver, Abby and Mikayla, all of you here today, you are God's beloved child. God announced this when you were baptized. God spoke through the church to call you by name and declare that you are saved, loved, freed from sin, found, that you are God's beloved. God reminds you of this good news over and over in words of love and promise for you, in a meal, in other people. Jesus has got a hold of you and will not let you go, no matter what. You belong to God. You are part of God's people.

You can face all the questions and struggles of this world knowing you are not alone. You can love because you are so loved.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.