

TITLE: "Getting To Know You"

TEXT: Luke 19:1-10 (NT p.82)

[Jesus] 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 [Jesus] 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 Zacchaeus 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."

Introduction – It's good to know those you will be staying with

One summer while in college, a friend and I stayed with his grandparents in northern Maine. The good news was that they had electricity. The bad news was that there was no indoor plumbing. Swatting mosquitoes while using the outhouse was an experience I'll not forget and not want to repeat. I was, however, very glad that I was not staying there in the winter when the temperatures regularly reached 20 below.

One thing I have learned from staying with people is this: It's better to know the people you will be staying with. And the longer you will be staying with them, the BETTER it is to know them beforehand.

This morning I want to give you some background on Zacchaeus. He was a tax collector and tax collectors were Jews who worked for the Roman government. They sat in toll booths and extracted taxes on goods that were being transported. The position was open to abuse and tax collectors often became rich, as Zacchaeus had, at the expense of their own citizens. The population's low opinion of tax collectors is summed up in the text where it reads, "ALL the people said that Jesus "had gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner," when he went to stay with Zacchaeus.

The sin of tax collectors went beyond overcharging taxes. Because they worked for the oppressive conqueror of their own people, tax collectors were seen as sinners against their whole community. Therefore, tax collectors were guilty of sin against the individuals they defrauded AND against their community.

1. Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus

The text tells us that Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus. Jesus was the One everyone was talking about and EVERYbody wanted to see Jesus. Zacchaeus, however, was short and could not see beyond the crowd that had gathered to see Jesus, and we can well imagine that no one in the crowd was about to make way for him. Zacchaeus was used to being publically shunned, so he simply climbed a tree to get a glimpse of this famous Jesus.

A LOT of people today want a glimpse of Jesus, but that is ALL they want. About five years ago, a young man attended some membership classes. He was a likeable soul, had a very good job and asked perceptive questions about Jesus. But when it came to making a commitment to Jesus, to actually accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior, he was not interested. He said, "Well, all religions are basically the same. Jesus is like Mohammed and Confucius and Buddha."

I said, "Well it is true that they were teachers and Jesus was teacher, but there is one MAJOR difference. ...Mohammed and Confucius and Buddha are all dead. ...Jesus is alive! ...The early followers of Jesus actually saw him after he was resurrected and they were so sure that it WAS Jesus, that they allowed themselves to be tortured to death by the THOUSANDS because they knew that they would be resurrected as Jesus was and they knew they would spend eternity with Jesus.

It's like the person who asked me why I could not accept the FACT that the universe came into being because of a spontaneous Big Bang and that humans evolved from random selection without any help from a Higher Power.

To which I answered: "So let me see if I have this straight. If I accept YOUR premises, in a thousand years I will just be part of the basic elements of the earth. But if I have faith in Jesus Christ, even in a billion years I will have an eternal body and will be living in a glorious kingdom WITH Jesus.

...Hmmm, a tough call, but I think that I will choose my life of faith."

SEEING Jesus, knowing ABOUT Jesus, accepting Jesus as a “good teacher” is not enough. And Jesus is very specific about this. Jesus says:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.

“I never KNEW you,” says Jesus. ...Knowing who Jesus is, is not the same as getting to know Jesus personally.

2. Jesus stayed with Zacchaeus

Fortunately, Zacchaeus did not have to settle for a mere glimpse of Jesus. The text says that Jesus STAYED with Zacchaeus and so Jesus obviously ATE with him.

...Jesus wants to do the same with each one of us. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus says: “Listen! I am standing at the door knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come into you and eat with you, and you with me.” Jesus had the original open door policy. It doesn’t matter WHO you are, or WHAT you’ve done, Jesus is standing in front of the door of your life waiting for you to let him in.

If you DO let Jesus in, he will come into you and befriend you. And your relationship will deepen as you do the following things:

Pray – which is TALKING to Jesus, and LISTENING to Jesus. Remember, prayer is NOT trying to get GOD to do what YOU want. The true purpose of prayer is to get in line with the plans GOD has for your life.

Reading the Bible – which is God’s Word. God SPEAKS to us through the Bible.

Worshiping God – which is coming to praise and worship God as we are doing right now in our worship service.

Helping those in need – Because Jesus says that as we DO help those in need, we are actually doing it to Jesus.

And Jesus eats with us when we have communion as we will be having in a few moments because Jesus says, “Whenever two or more are gathered in my name, there I am in your midst.” So be especially AWARE of the Lord’s presence as you eat the bread and drink the juice this morning

3. Zacchaeus repented

Zacchaeus' friendship with Jesus changed him dramatically. Prior TO that day, Zacchaeus's claim to fame was his money. People could snub him in public, they could demean him because of his short stature, they could despise him as a hated tax collector, but he could look them in the eye and say, "At least I'm rich."

But when Jesus befriended Zacchaeus, Zacchaeus changed. And he did not just change superficially. Had it been a slight change, he would have made a small donation to Jesus' ministry. No. Zacchaeus changed SO much that he REPENTED of his sins. Repentance actually means to "turn around." Repentance is not simply admitting that you did something wrong; that is confession.

REPENTANCE means that we actually renounce our sinful ways and CHANGE and go the way GOD wants us to go. Remember that Zacchaeus had two levels of sin. There was the sin against individuals he had defrauded and there was the sin against his people as a whole because he worked for the Roman.

Listen to what the text says after Jesus befriended Zacchaeus: "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." ...Zacchaeus turned around. He changed. He now depended upon his Lord instead of his money, so he could give half his possessions to the poor and repay those he had defrauded 4-fold.

What in your life can YOU let go of so that you can begin to have a deeper relationship with Jesus? What prop, what coping mechanism, are you depending upon that keeps you from depending upon Jesus? IS it money or what money can buy? Pornography? Drinking to excess? Eating too much? Computer games? Being in control? Too much TV? Relationships with the wrong people?

THINK about this. It's important. Lent begins this week. Our Ash Wednesday service will be preceded by a light dinner at 6:00 and the service will be at 7:00 p.m. Be thinking about the things you use to prop up your life and ask the Lord to help you give them up during Lent.

Conclusion – “Getting to Know You”

So, what will you get if you ask God to help you to give up your particular prop and you begin to do so? ...Your relationship with Jesus will begin to grow. ...My mother was on the stage prior to marrying my dad. When I was growing up, she sang in musicals in our town which were probably like the Footlighters here in Dryden. One of the songs she sang was “Getting to Know You” by Oscar Hammerstein from *The King and I*. Here are some of the words:

Getting to know you,
 Getting to feel free and easy.
 When I am with you,
 Getting to know what to say
 Haven't you noticed
 Suddenly I'm bright and breezy
 Because of all the beautiful and new
 Things I'm learning about you
 Day by day.

That's the way it IS with Jesus. That's what Zacchaeus found, that's what you will find. Props and coping mechanisms get heavier and heavier as time goes by. When you get to know Jesus, life gets lighter and lighter so that you feel bright and breezy much more of the time.

Remember the statements with which I began? ...One thing I learned from staying with people is this: It's better to know the people you will be staying with. And the longer you will be staying with them, the BETTER it is to know them beforehand.

You and I are going to spend eternity with Jesus. Don't you think it's a good idea to start getting to know Jesus right now?

Amen.