

## **SERMON FOR NOVEMBER 3, 2013<sup>i</sup>**

The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i UCC

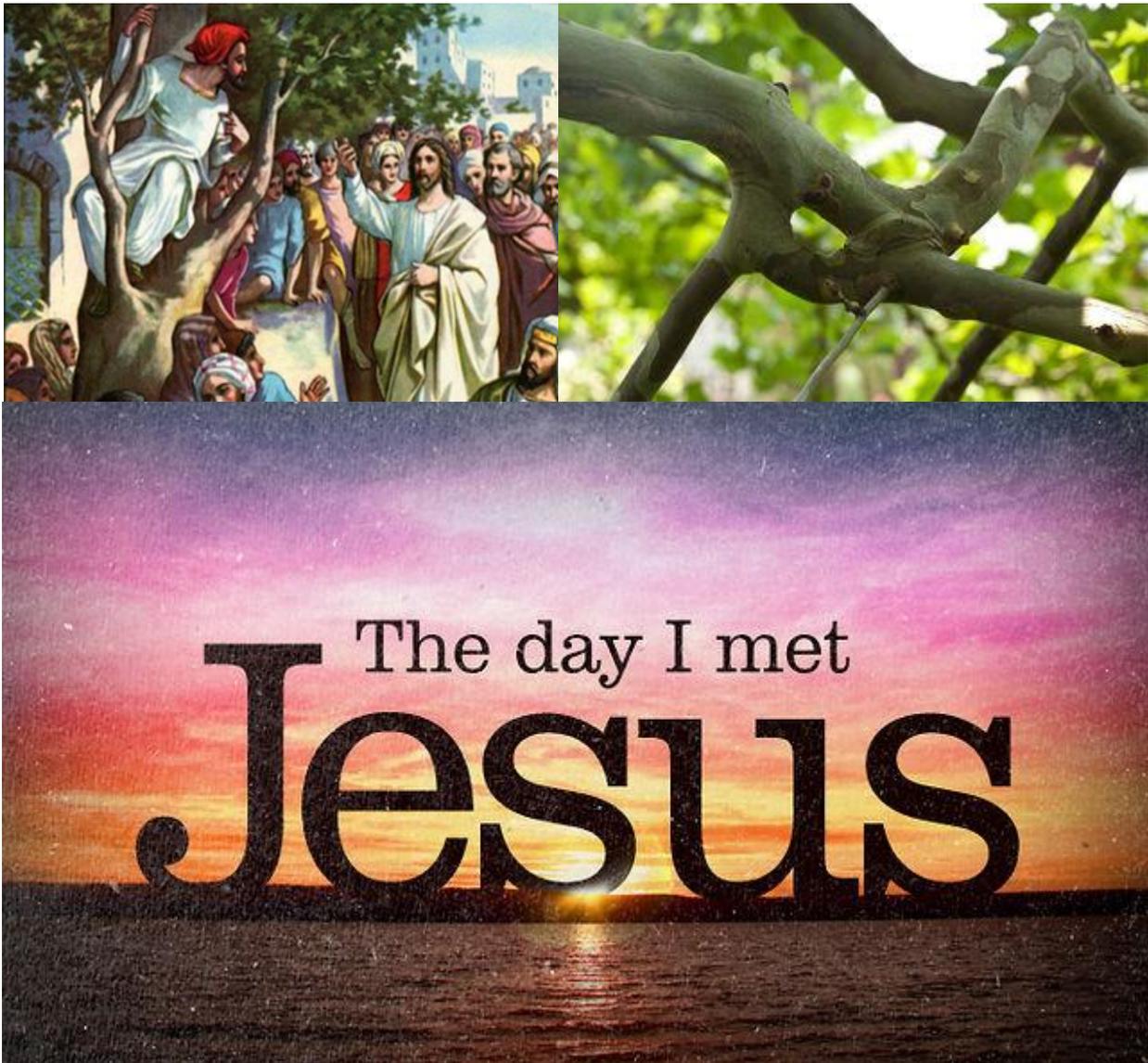
***Remembrance Sunday-All Saints Sunday***

7:45 & 10:30 Worship Services

Scripture: **Luke 19:1-10 (Focus)**

Message: ***"We Are Witnesses of GOD's Aloha!"***

Kekapa P.K. Lee



## **Gathering in the Word**

Today's story of **Zacchaeus** is a favorite in Sunday schools and books of children's Bible stories mostly because of the storytelling possibilities natural in the figure of the **head tax collector for Rome who was the richest man in town as one who is "barely stands five feet tall" and who climbs a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus.** But for all its funny overtones and nuances—the story presents vivid instances of two of Luke's major themes: (1) the theme of the Great Reversal and (2) Luke's particular view of the spiritual significance of wealth. **That the first will be last, the humble will be exalted, the outcasts are welcomed, the privileged are disposed, and all measures of human success and importance is broken and reordered in GOD's reign!**

## **Hearing the Word**

### **Luke 19:1-10 (The VOICE Bible)**

19 Jesus enters Jericho and seems only to be passing through. <sup>2</sup> Living in Jericho is a man named **Zacchaeus**. He's the head tax collector and is very rich. <sup>3</sup> He is also very short. He wants to see Jesus as He passes through the center of town, but he can't get a glimpse because the crowd blocks his view. <sup>4</sup> So he runs ahead of the crowd and climbs up into a sycamore tree so he can see Jesus when He passes beneath him.

<sup>5</sup> Jesus comes along and looks up into the tree [and there He sees Zacchaeus].

**Jesus:** Zacchaeus, hurry down from that tree because **it is necessary to stay** at your house *tonight*.

<sup>6</sup> Zacchaeus scrambles down and **joyfully** brings Jesus back to his house. <sup>7</sup> Now the crowd sees this, and they're upset.

**Crowd** (*grumbling*): Jesus has become the houseguest of his fellow who is a notorious sinner.

**Zacchaeus:** <sup>8</sup> Lord, I am giving half of my goods to the poor, and whomever I have cheated I will pay back four times what I took.

**Jesus:** <sup>9</sup> Today liberation has come to this house, since even Zacchaeus is living as a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man came to seek and to liberate the lost.

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Maybe it was the sycamore tree that did it!

Maybe even before Jesus wandered by, Zacchaeus looked at where he was and wondered how he had come to this! What was it that had quite literally chased Zacchaeus up the sycamore tree?

- ✓ His nice *Armani* tunic had a chlorophyll stain or two on it from the sycamore leaves he smushed, crushed, and smashed up against on his way up into the branches!
- ✓ Zacchaeus had scuffed his *Bruno Magli sandals* and had chipped one of his nicely manicured fingernails on his left hand!
- ✓ And now there Zacchaeus was—hunched up in that tree like some schoolboy hiding from the teacher!

This was ridiculous!

- ✓ What was Zacchaeus who was very rich doing in this silly position?
- ✓ This was no place for a man like Zacchaeus!
- ✓ Was Zacchaeus hiding peering at Jesus through the leaves and branches.
- ✓ So when the parade stops—Jesus looks up at Zacchaeus and as well as everybody else!

But Jesus speaks kindly and says that it's at Zacchaeus' house that Jesus will stay for the day. Zacchaeus' welcomed Jesus as he tumbled out of the tree. Something about the very presence of Jesus changed this *sawed-off little crook*. Luke 19 makes clear that Zacchaeus really didn't climb up into that tree looking for a change in his lifestyle or outlook or fiscal practices—he was curious—that's all!

Ah—but sometimes curiosity is the outward **manifestation** and **sign** of an inward emptiness and restlessness!

- ✓ On the surface Zacchaeus had it all!
- ✓ He appeared to have it all his life together!
- ✓ He knew what he wanted and how to get it!
- ✓ As a matter of fact—he already had all that he wanted already!

But despite all that—here he was up that sycamore tree and wondering how it all had come this. Maybe it was that sycamore tree that did it! Maybe at some point as he was looking all around on that tree—the thought had come to him and he was lost!

## **And just when Jesus said, “Zacchaeus!” and somehow Zacchaeus knew he’d been found!**

Two little Greek words leap out of the text:

- ✓ The first is when Jesus says that he “**must**” stay at Zacchaeus’ house that day in verse 5. The verb is the tiny Greek word **dei** and it is the same word used so often in the New Testament when the writer wants to convey the necessity of Jesus’ death on the cross. “*It is necessary*” is more the typical translation of **dei** and it ties in just often enough to the utter *necessity* of GOD’s way of doing salvation that its use here in Luke 19 tells you that this business about Jesus’ wanting to stay at that particular house was in the end going to be **a matter of redemption—of salvation itself!**
- ✓ The other Greek word is the one that describes Zacchaeus’ reaction to Jesus is in verse 6: Zacchaeus received Jesus **chairon, “with joy.”** We go back to Luke 15 and read how this kind of **joy** was the bottom line of all three of the parables of *lost-and-found*. The **joy** with which this little tax collection received Jesus is the very **joy** that always crops up when salvation is in the air!

Oh, and the fact that this **joy** was present BEFORE Zacchaeus did any of this subsequent actions of giving money back to the poor and those he deceived is further proof that **Zacchaeus was saved not by those works but by the grace that came FIRST and that then overflowed into those later deeds!**

Author Frederick Buechner (his book Peculiar Treasures: A Biblical Who's Who) observes this:

**Zacchaeus** is a sawed-off little social disaster with a big bank account and a crooked joy, but Jesus welcomes him aboard anyway, and that's why Zacchaeus reminds you of all the others, too. There's **Aaron** whopping it up with the Golden Calf the moment his brother's back is turned, and there's **Jacob** conning everybody including his own father. There's **Jael** driving a tent-peg through the head of an overnight guest, and **Rahab**, the first of the *red-hot mamas*. There's **Nebuchadnezzar** with his taste for roasting the opposition, and **Paul** holding the lynch mobs coats as they go to work on **Stephen**. There's **Saul** the paranoid, and **David** the stud, and those mealy-mouthed friends of **Job's** who would probably have succeeded in boring Job to death if **Yahweh GOD** had not stepped in the nick of time. And then there are the ones who betrayed the poor who loved them best such as **Absalom** and poor old **Peter**, such as **Judas** even!

Like **Zacchaeus**, they're all of them somehow treasured—too! Why? Who knows? But maybe you can say at least this about it—that they're treasured less for who they are and for what the world has made them than **for what they have it in them at their best to be because ultimately, of course, it's not the world that made them at all!**

Yahweh GOD says in **Psalm 24: The earth and all that's upon it belong to the Eternal GOD—and in the**

**long run—presumably—that goes for each of us here on this Remembrance Sunday, November 3<sup>rd</sup>!**

## **Doing the Word**

So what is the Word of God for us on this Remembrance Sunday?

### **1.ONE: GENEROSITY BEGETS GENEROSITY; INVITATION CAN BEGET TRANSFORMATION!**

- ✓ The ultimate gift-giver is GOD—whose unexpected, undeserved, unrepayable, reckless impetuosity—saturates our whole perception of life and faith and is able **to transform us to what we were to what we can become in Jesus!**
- ✓ It is its sheer limitlessness, surprise and even a kind of madness that knocks us off our feet every time and induces its own kind of madness in us!
- ✓ The crowd that day must have been baffled and peeved at how quickly the indiscriminate initiative of Jesus produced such quick results in such a notorious “sinner.” But that’s what faith and GOD’s grace is about!

### **2.TWO: OUR PARTICIPATION IN SYSTEMS OF FINANCE AND MONEY CAN ONLY BECOME GODLY WHEN IT IS DIRECTED TOWARD REALIZING JUSTICE, RIGHT-RELATIONSHIPS, AND GENUINELY MUTUAL WELL-BEING FOR ALL!**

### **3.THREE: GOD CAN JUST FORGIVE SIN AND GOD CAN PRONOUNCE SALVATION APART OF SALVATION—BECAUSE IT'S GOD WHO'S DOING IT!**

We always have believed that repentance *always* comes before salvation. And here we have it—Jesus has singled out Zacchaeus in order to stay with him as his house, honoring him with his presence (much to the annoyance and disappointment of the crowds). And then Jesus honors him a second time but not arguing with his claim about his *righteous behavior* but instead **affirming it—declaring that no matter what the crowds may think—yet Zacchaeus is indeed a child of Abraham—one of the covenantal people, a beloved child of GOD.** Like it or not—Jesus seems to say, and contrary to all expectations—this chief tax collector is one of GOD's own and, even more—lives like it!

Many of us struggle to imagine that GOD would just forgive sin—apart from some meaningful repentance. After all—if GOD just forgave us, what would become of GOD's justice? What if—GOD doesn't care as much about justice as we do—that is—what if justice wasn't the primary category GOD use all along? Maybe justice is our way of tracking each other, our way of defining each other, of keeping score, of following who's in and who's out, who's up and who's down.

If this is so—if GOD regularly trumps GOD's justice—and I believe Jesus died precisely to show us that it is—then we're operating with flawed categories!

## **Sent in the Word**

Maybe that's exactly why Jesus again shocks the crowds and disciples alike by seeking out this rich tax collector, honoring him, affirming him, naming him a child of GOD and declaring that, indeed, salvation has come this very day to his household.

Maybe it's to remind us that we were never in control in the first place. This, while hard to take, proves in the long run to be a good thing as GOD's mercy so greatly exceeds either our need or expectations.

**THANKS BE TO GOD!**

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<sup>i</sup> I use [www.textweek.com](http://www.textweek.com) to research the exegesis texts for my sermons. Before you had to buy the text books!