

*Sermon preached by Rev Rachel McDougall*

*St Paul's Canterbury*

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*Being sought by the one we seek – The lost being found*

He was trying to see who Jesus was.

I wonder what the most embarrassing thing you've done to try to see something or someone.

There are people who queue over night for footy tickets.

There are people who queued over night to see the Queen's coffin, or to see the hearse go by – a moment of time when they were part of something bigger.

It speaks of a longing to experience something along with others, to experience it for ourselves.

I remember Mum taking me as a child when Charles and Di visited Hobart and we waited for what seemed to be hours by the side of the road to see them. (I remember being disappointed that we got Charles on our side of the street and not Diana.)

This story is the last interaction that Jesus has with anyone before he enters Jerusalem. It is the final story that Luke tells of Jesus' ministry before he goes to his death.

It is a story that says something about who Jesus is and what matters to him.

It has a sense of humour and is so memorable.

We are introduced to Zacchaeus a chief tax collector who was rich.

He is trying to see who Jesus and can't. The crowds are in the way, and he is too short, so he runs and climbs a tree.

It doesn't seem to matter to him what people will think.

He just does it. It is more important for him to see Jesus rather than stand on dignity. You can imagine the smirks in the crowd now and the laughter at seeing Zacchaeus running and then up a tree in all his finery.

I think we glimpse here something of the longing that is in Zacchaeus to see Jesus.

It speaks of an underlying deep need within him, a sense of emptiness or lostness that fills him that he doesn't care what people think of him running ahead and climbing a tree.

For Zacchaeus was a lost one within his community.

He was a chief tax collector –he was a collaborator with the foreign occupying power doing a job that his neighbours would have despised and getting rich off the proceeds.

He is the modern-day equivalent of the people smuggler or an official in a Ukraine in a Russian occupied city doing the bidding of the Russians.

Zacchaeus might be rich, but he was excluded from his community.

What a shock it must have been to the crowd to hear Jesus address him by name and to stay with him.

No wonder they grumble.

Jesus saw him and became his guest.

Today, salvation has come to Zac's house.

What Zac does next is open to interpretation and changes how we read the whole story.

In our English version of the story Zacc says what he will do – give half of what he has to the poor and pay back someone 4x as much as he has defrauded. It looks like the encounter with Jesus has transformed his life. Is it a sign of repentance and changed behaviours that results? And then is this the key point of the story?

There is another way of reading it.

The Greek is in the present tense so he could be talking about what he is already doing.

This then opens up the story to being about Jesus' welcome of Zac – Jesus addresses him - today salvation has come to this house for the son of Man came to seek out and save the lost.

Zac is lost in his community and Jesus places him right back into it as Zac says what he is doing.

The great irony of this story is that Zac goes to great effort to see Jesus and all the time it seems that Jesus has been seeking him.

Jesus looks up at him in his tree and declares him found.

The challenge to the crowd is that Zac is someone who is lost to them, who they don't care about. Yet this is the one whom Jesus seeks out.

It is not impossible then for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.

I wonder where you are in this story.

Are you the one who is feeling a bit lost and wondering where God is and trying to see God?

Are you one who feels excluded in some way and misunderstood?

Or are you in the crowd grumbling at the one whom Jesus chooses to see?

Or are you Jesus who sees the one no one else wants to see?

Wherever you find yourself in this story I think the invitation is to know that we too are children of Abraham.

Today salvation has come as Jesus came to seek out and save the lost.

We might be feeling a bit lost or vulnerable as a community but rest assured God is active in our midst when one person feels met by Jesus, when one who feels lost is reconnected.

It is easy for us to get lost in worries and problems and our own vulnerability and in the midst of others who grumble. Yet this is precisely where we are met and found and sought out.

The irony is that as we seek we are found, in our vulnerability whether we be up a tree or running around, Jesus meets us and seeks us and finds us. It is Jesus who seeks us out and recognises us and finds us.

So often we think we have to find God and yet we are each God's child and it is God who seeks us.

There is a lovely Ignatian practise of prayer that starts with becoming aware of how God is already looking at us full of grace and love.

There is a favourite prayer practise that Therese of Avila used to help experience Christ's love for you. You might find it helpful. It is very simple.

Imagine you see Jesus standing before you. He is looking at you... Notice him looking at you... Notice that he is looking at you, lovingly and humbly... Notice that he is looking at you lovingly...notice that he is looking at you humbly.

*Lectios:*

*Habakkuk 1.1-4, 2.1-4,*

*Psalm 119.137-144*

*2 Thessalonians 1.1-4, 11-12*