

## **Open Door Talk Luke 19:1-10 Zacchaeus**

Whenever I hear the story of Zaccheus, I can't help but think of the song I must have learnt when I was a child: 'Zaccheus was a very wee man and a very wee man was he'.... Perhaps I am just showing my age with that song, but it is a story I haven't particularly thought about for some time, but it is not just one the children in Junior Church can enjoy. It is another encounter that someone has with Jesus, a life changing encounter that we would do well to explore with older eyes

It takes place much later in Jesus' ministry than the stories that we have been exploring over the last few weeks. This one comes towards the end of Jesus' three years of teaching and preaching. His face is now set towards Jerusalem and within a very short time in Luke's gospel Jesus will be entering the city of Jerusalem followed only a few days later by his arrest, trial and death on the cross.

But for now, Jesus is still on the way, and we find him in the city of Jericho, and it is here that Zacchaeus lives and works as a chief tax collector

Tax collectors were hated – they were seen as collaborators working for the Roman oppressors and not members of the community. That would have been enough for most people to have disliked this group of people but the entire tax collecting system was unjust and oppressive.

You see tax collecting was farmed out; anyone could buy the franchise for a province or a particular area; and then subcontract

it out to others beneath you. The way you made money was by extracting more in taxes than you needed to send to those higher up and finally to Rome. So, if you were a tax collector, you wanted to squeeze as much as you could out of the people. Zaccheus must have been quite good at it, because he was rich.

However, Zaccheus the chief tax-collector, wanted to see Jesus and Zacchaeus' desire to see Jesus, and Jesus seeing him, leads to their deeper encounter.

If you look in your Bible you will find that this story comes hot on the heels of another account about seeing, that of a blind man sitting by the road side and his healing leading to the recovery of his sight.

So, having wanted to see Jesus, and after Jesus had seen Zacchaeus, Jesus called to him and told him that he was going to stay at his house. This would have been shocking to all the people looking on. Fancy going to Zacchaeus' house, no self-respecting person would want to do that, Zacchaeus was an extortionist and collaborator. No wonder they began to grumble that Jesus had gone to be a guest at a house of a sinner.

Through Luke's gospel, Jesus eats with sinners, prostitutes and tax collectors those who were considered to be at the bottom of the social standings in the community, those on the very margins of society that others would prefer to ignore and certainly not eat with. Like the encounters we have looked at over the last couple of weeks: Jesus' encounter with a widow, one of the most vulnerable people in society and then last week the Roman

centurion, a non-Jew and someone who was considered to be a foreign enemy, Jesus' encounter with this tax collector shows us once again that his mission is for all people, including the vulnerable, those who are hated or on the edges of society.

So Jesus goes to Zachaeus' house and there he praises Zacchaeus by saying that "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

Jesus says this in response to Zacchaeus' statement: Look, half of my possessions, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold."

Sometimes those sentences are translated in the future – I will give to the poor and I will restore or give back but in the translation we have heard, and others, it is in the present. Zacchaeus is already doing it, he is already giving back to the poor and to those he has cheated before he had even met Jesus. Perhaps he had heard from others Jesus' teaching and had changed his ways? Perhaps that was why he is was so keen to actually see Jesus for himself?

But somewhat curiously Jesus does not declare that Zacchaeus has faith, but rather that he is a son of Abraham, a member of the Jewish community even if the others in his community didn't really think that way. 'Salvation' is suggestive of being restored to the community of God's people, marked by the presence of Jesus himself in his house. And there weren't any actual words of repentance on Zacchaeus' behalf, he didn't say sorry for what he

had done that are recorded, or of Jesus offering his forgiveness to Zaccheus...

What seems to be important was that Zaccheus was on something of a quest, he not only wanted to see Jesus but also to know who Jesus is. And he goes to quite extraordinary lengths to do so by climbing a tree, even running the risk of being put to shame by doing something quite so unbecoming for someone in his important position. The crowd makes it difficult to see but Zaccheus is not put off and he is rewarded. Zaccheus sees Jesus and Jesus sees him and Jesus calls him by name. He knows him.

Unlike most of the encounters Jesus has with others, the name of the man is recorded. The name Zaccheus means righteous one or pure one. Was this a name that he was called in an ironic way whilst still a tax collector when he was anything other than righteous, after all he was a cheat, or perhaps this was the name he was known by after he had changed his ways and encountered Jesus.

Zacchaeus' joy and excitement are rewarded, even while the crowd grumbles around him. Jesus invites himself to Zacchaeus' home, so that their brief encounter becomes a longer one. Luke writes that Zaccheus was happy to welcome Jesus. I imagine that that was a bit of an understatement. Zacchaeus becomes the honoured and gracious host, and Jesus the honoured and gracious guest.

This encounter allows Zaccheaus an excited and joyful encounter with Jesus himself and Jesus for a short time can relax in the man's home as he prepares to enter Jerusalem and all that will follow.

There is little joy in our world. Over the last week alone we have heard of two air crashes, ongoing forest fires and storms, the threat of global trade wars and new conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo...

Jesus comes to us. Jesus sees us just as he saw Zacchaeus. But do we really want to have that life-changing encounter with Jesus? Do we want to see him? Jesus calls each of us by name and invites us to spend time with him to simply be in his presence. I pray that those encounters would fill us with joy and that our lives would be transformed.