

6pm Service St. John's 31st Oct 2021: Hallowe'en – Trick or Treat?

Bible Reading: Luke 19:1-10

So, Hallowe'en – I don't know how many of you may have had a visit to your house to offer you 'trick or treat', but rather than being critical or negative I want to share something positive and encouraging with you, and ask – TRICK OR TREAT or TREE OR TEA.

Some of us are old enough to remember the rhyme:

Zacchaeus was a very little man,
And a very little man was he.
He climbed up into a sycamore tree,
For the Saviour he wanted to see.
Now when the Saviour passed that way,
He looked up into the tree,
And said, "Zacchaeus you come down,
For I'm coming to your house for tea."

Jesus knew the WORTH of Zacchaeus.

How much are each of worth in regard to our chemical make-up?

Someone once said about £4. I suggest if that is all each one of us was worth we wouldn't be here today.

Do you realise that probably most advertising is geared to people who have a low opinion of themselves.

They need possessions, position; want to look better than they are (lift the wrinkles etc.), need to perform better. "You need to improve your wash," they say: white, brighter, new improved colours.

IF WE WERE ZACCHAEUS we would be told, "you need to improve your height:" "Short? Climb a tree!" – preferably a sycamore-fig tree.

What are we worth? Are we glad about who we are? Are we really excited about who we are as people?

The way that we answer these questions will determine how we live our lives. A free translation of Proverbs 23:7 is, "As a person thinks, so they are."

Do you know it's not so much who we are, but who we THINK we are that determines our actions.

Zacchaeus was a tax collector – DID HE THINK HE WAS OR COULD BE SOMEONE ELSE? – Was that the reason he wanted to see Jesus?

One of the problems we have in the world is that some people don't like themselves. YET WE ARE TOLD TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBOUR AS OURSELVES.

Did Zacchaeus start to dislike himself? Was he ashamed of the way he TRICKED people into paying excessive taxes and pocketing the excess?

Also remembering that he was collecting the tax for the Roman occupiers of the country.

Two problems Zacchaeus may have had come to mind.

- 1) He was a LONER – so LONELINESS
- 2) LOW OPINION OF HIMSELF

Many people may prefer to be someone else.

(The Lottery, they think, might change them and their circumstances.)

I suggest that if we can't accept ourselves as we are, it is difficult to see how others can accept us.

How many for instance see themselves as failures, but in fact they are successful?

Do we believe that business people continue because they want to make more money, or because they WANT TO SEE IF THEY CAN STILL RUN A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS? The truth, I believe, is more likely the latter – Similarly that is why older dads, grandads and even great-grandads still think we can play cricket or even football.

If we think who we would rather be other than ourselves we have a problem. As Christians I believe we have to say, with all our shortcomings, but with the abilities and gifts God has given us, we would not want to be anyone BUT WHO WE ARE as we seek to grow to be MORE LIKE JESUS and be a “channel of His peace”.

I want to share with you a few further considerations.

RECOGNITION – How do we look? – Zacchaeus climbed a tree to see Jesus, but did he also climb a tree because of how he thought he would appear to Jesus and the crowd? Or did he think he could TRICK them and hide?

ACHIEVEMENTS – How do we do? And how do we do in relation to someone else?

Zacchaeus COULDN'T see Jesus.

Zacchaeus COULD climb a tree. (And had determination.)

But Jesus knew he could treat others better and perform in other ways.

POSSESSIONS – How much do we have? The more possessions we have the more we can be accepted. “I'll be someone.” THAT IS HOW THE WORLD THINKS. It didn't work very well for Zacchaeus. He had possessions gained by cheating others. He TRICKED others to TREAT himself.

IMPORTANCE – How important are we? “If only we can have that job/position.” Zacchaeus was CHIEF Tax Collector (verse 2) AND had a good view from the tree. Zacchaeus' POSITION in the tree turned out to be more IMPORTANT than being the CHIEF Tax Collector.

POWER – How can we do? Zacchaeus had power to get more money and therefore had power and influence over some people but he was no doubt disliked. Have you ever thought that some of the disciples of Jesus might have been paying taxes to Zacchaeus? Maybe on fishing business?

The POWER we have in Jesus enables us through the Holy Spirit to do exceptional things. God has unlimited resources to TREAT us with.

If we based our worth on the world's view of RECOGNITION, ACHIEVEMENTS, POSSESSIONS, IMPORTANCE and POWER, we will never experience the TREAT of joy with which God our Heavenly Father intends for us His children to experience, of BEING WHO WE UNIQUELY ARE.

Zacchaeus had to get rid of all of these; "Come down!" SO HE DID! He put things right. He gave half his possessions to the poor and paid back fourfold – which was according to the Law, by the way. (Penalty for a thief: 4 times.)

But what can cause us to have a low opinion of ourselves?

– We don't see ourselves as God sees us.

Our opinion of ourselves should be what God sees we are worth.

Jesus knew what Zacchaeus was worth. Jesus knows what each one of us is worth.

Let's look at some of the causes of having a low opinion of ourselves.

DISOBEDIENCE – People who live continually in disobedience to God cannot have a healthy opinion of themselves. Sin in one's life has to affect the way a person looks at themselves. And it spoils their life.

Zacchaeus KNEW he was doing wrong and it was affecting his life. He had to do something about it. TO SEE JESUS WAS THAT SOMETHING.

LIMITATIONS – Because we know the story, let's look at it through spiritual eyes. – "Lord, Lord" he called Jesus (verse 8). Effectively – "Here are my limitations – I'm short, (I'm a sinner), BUT YOU CAN COME TO MY HOUSE, (Come into my life). Use me in Your service, I give myself over to You." THAT WAS ZACCHAEUS' VIEW. Our own view is important.

Do you believe that you are living beyond your limitations, because you have given your life over to the Lord? In other words, is the Holy Spirit in your life? Has God said to you, "Come down! With all your limitations, I can use you in My Kingdom"?

It doesn't mean we haven't any shortcomings, it means we are aware of them, as well as our strengths. Our God can take our weaknesses and make them into strengths.

INCORRECT THEOLOGY – I just take one example. Isaiah 64:6 doesn't say we are as filthy rags, but the acts that we seek to produce are as filthy rags. – WE ARE NOT WORTH NOTHING. – Zacchaeus was not worth nothing. God made us in His own image and Jesus died for us. THAT'S HOW MUCH WE ARE WORTH – SPECIAL. – See yourself as God sees you.

Yes, HUMILITY IS IMPORTANT, but if we don't see that God has made us NEW CREATIONS, we are doubting His power and SAVING GRACE.

Humility doesn't mean thinking less of yourself. It means thinking of yourself less.

I often tell people that Jacob had a PhD in holiness: Position, honesty, direction. Zacchaeus also had the same. Position (in the tree), honesty (admitting his wrongs), direction (came down to a new life).

“We we walk with the Lord” He will give us the direction of travel in life.

One last thought, or rather two:

1) If you are a Christian, don't bend to pressure.

Don't be threatened when someone else succeeds, BUT REJOICE IN THEIR SUCCESS.

Jesus had gone to Zacchaeus' house. There may have been those who could have said, “He went to that cheat's house – He should have come to mine!” BUT, FRIEND, IS HE NOT ALREADY IN YOUR HOUSE?

He is in your life if you are a Christian, because your body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

2) If you are not a Christian YET, Jesus said about Zacchaeus (verse 9),

“Today salvation has come to this house.”

(it is not a TRICK, it is more than a TREAT, it is a GIFT.)

He humbled himself, he came down, REPENTED and was RESTORED
– A TREE TO TEA EXPERIENCE.

Notice what Jesus said in verse 5, “I must stay at your house today.”

AMEN.

A PRAYER :-

Heavenly Father we thank You that You loved us so much that You sent Your Son to forgive and restore us, so that we have access to you always. We pray for those who are figuratively up a tree, to come down and trust, today, in the Lord Jesus.

We give You all the glory.

AMEN.