



When the Room Goes Quiet

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Twenty-First Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 19:1-10

Grace and peace to you my friends in faith,

Imagine this scenario... you enter a room and the two people talking suddenly get quiet, awkward, and refuse to make eye contact with you.

What are the reasons why this could happen?

They're gossiping about you, something bad just happened, they're planning a surprise secret birthday party about you! Or they just don't want to talk to you

It's an awkward feeling, right? Even if it's gonna be a surprise or good news, it's impossible not to feel left out, shunned.

I have a feeling that when Zacchaeus walked into a room, nobody wanted to talk to him. Nobody wanted to let him in on the secret. Nobody wanted to spend any more time with him than absolutely necessary.

He was seen as a sellout. A villain.

He wasn't just the tax collector. He was the CHIEF tax collector.

Small in stature??? That didn't stop him from rising to power... like Lord Farquaad (SLIDE from Shrek)

I'm guessing nobody had a relationship with him. He must have been very isolated. Alone. Cut off from society.

You might ask, Zacchaeus (SLIDE of Zacchaeus), all this money, was it worth it? Nobody likes you.

He'd show up, tell you what you owe, you'd pay... what you could, and maybe need to make promises about future payment if you were a little short this month.

It's a business focused on people, but it's very isolating and lacks genuine relationships. Zacchaeus is known to be unethical. A cheat. Greedy.

He's bad news bears. He deserves to be alone.



Right?

Now... what if, you're in that same room with Jesus. And when Zacchaeus walks in, Jesus doesn't just notice him, he stops talking to you... and invites himself over to his house!

Scandalous, isn't it? Jesus! Don't you KNOW who that is? That's OUR enemy! That's the guy we DON'T talk to. That's the guy who squeezes every penny out of us.

You're going to his house?! Zacchaeus is gonna use MY hard-earned money to feed you, care for you. It's bad enough I give all of my money to him, now you've given him an excuse to be even MORE extravagant. I'm sure he'll come back around asking for more to pay the Romans!

Sorry Jesus, you've crossed the line. I can't go for this.

Zacchaeus is rotten. Yet Jesus notices him.

It's when Zacchaeus is invited to show him hospitality that genuine repentance and awareness happens. His eyes are open. To follow Christ, he sees what he must do (SLIDE of scripture).

Christ, who forgives OUR debts, has made Zacchaeus understand that HE must forgive those debts of others he's cheated, swindled, and profited from.

Zacchaeus isn't just a cute story about a short dude who finally gets seen. It's a graphic example of the depths of God's grace for each and every one of us.

If it were up to us humans to determine who was in, and who was out, our judgment might be a bit biased. We might be quick to exclude those whom God has created and loved.

Yet God seeks us out. God calls on us, each of us, to use our gifts for the sake of the world. God isn't expecting us to be perfect. We aren't supposed to have it all figured out, and THEN, go out and make a difference.

No, we will make mistakes. We'll turn inward and forget whose really in charge. But Christ won't let go. Won't abandon us, even when we think we deserve to be abandoned.

Living this way can be quite a change. The transformation of Zacchaeus is nothing short of miraculous.

Today is Reformation Sunday—a convenient yearly reminder that change is important and change is inevitable.



But it's also the day before Halloween. What if we reframed the Zacchaeus story with Halloween in mind?

Zacchaeus isn't wearing a costume, but he's certainly not a welcome figure that you'd want to meet on a normal day.

Except Jesus shows us a new way. (SLIDE of Halloween)

An elder in the United Methodist Church suggests another way of reimagining Halloween:

Halloween is a day when strangers come to us. They're beautiful, ugly, odd, or scary.

We accept them, without question, and compliment them, treat them with kindness, and give them good things.

Why don't we live like that every day?

Why don't we live like all of our neighbors—the friends we sit next to today, but also the Zacchaeus's in our lives, the ones that make us squirm and avoid making eye contact with—what if we lived like that neighbor mattered too?

Imagine the peace and the calm upon our hearts of seeing each other as fellow pieces of God's abundant and loving creation. Why don't we live like that every day? Amen.