

31st Sunday in ordinary time LK 19:1-10

I love the books of Wisdom in the OT. There are 7 books among those we call Wisdom books: the book of Job, the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, the book of Wisdom and Sirach, Today our first reading— from the Book of Wisdom is given to us, I believe, to help us sharpen our perspective on who we are in the big scheme of things and remind us that we belong to God.

We just heard that for our heavenly Father the whole universe is like a stray grain of wheat on a scale or a drop of morning dew on the earth..... humbling images..... And we heard that despite the enormity of God compared with our limited little selves, he has endless mercy and forgiveness for us all. His mercy really is boundless toward everyone and everything because we are his creations. He really likes us!

And God is not pushy with regard to what he sees as our purpose here on earth. Which is to grow in goodness and holiness. He make this purpose known little by little. A nudge

here....a realization there, a subtle warning over here...until we abandon the parts of us that may be misguided and begin to rely on him, to really connect with him in an everyday sort of way.

He is, after all, in everyone one of us, so there is something very familiar and even intimate about this connection he has with us.

There is a place within us where we are all destined to meet him.

We just need to look for it, and listen more closely.

I believe we all have a deep desire to meet him.

That deep desire to meet God, must have been what motivated the main character in our Gospel today. Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector in the city of Jericho. In those times Jericho was a wealthy city. A lot of wealthy people means a lot of taxes to collect, so Zacchaeus was not **just a** tax collector— he was a rich one. Despite his riches, despite his attachment to the stuff of this world, he had a burning desire in his heart to meet this Messiah, this Jesus who was causing such a stir around there.

My sense is that Zacchaeus was not a young man, after all you don't become chief tax collector overnight. He probably had to work up through the ranks. So, here— it seems from our story — we have a middle aged man acting like a teenager. I know he was a small guy, but running to try and meet Jesus, and climbing trees? I can't remember the last time I climbed a tree. But I don't think Zacchaeus was discovering his inner child. I think he was obeying that inner desire to encounter God that we all have in our hearts. Because deep down we know we belong to God, we all have that inner desire. It was **part** of Zacchaeus, and It's part of us.... because God created us that way.

Which reminds me of a story. This is the story of the littlest Angel— not the littlest tax collector— the littlest Angel.

Back when God was putting the finishing touches on the earth he decided he wanted to sign his creation. Yes, he wanted to put his signature somewhere you know, like DaVinci signs his masterpiece in a discreet spot on the bottom left corner of the Mona Lisa. He's really busy, so God decided to ask his angels for

some help. So he assigned a group of angels to work on this project—where should he sign his creation.

All the angels in the group came up with great ideas, and one at a time they offered these ideas to God. The first one suggested he put his signature a beautiful sunset, the next suggested he could sign a waterfall in the rainforest, the next suggested somewhere subtle like—the underside of a leaf. But nothing suited God's fancy until the last member of the group spoke up, this was the littlest angel. One with the stature of.....Zacchaeus..... spoke up, and she said I know where you should sign your creation, most human beings will never think to look there, but it will be the best place of all. And God agreed... so he signed his creation..... on every human heart.

I have a feeling that Zacchaeus had encountered Jesus long before Jesus arrived in Jericho....don't you? Jesus speaks to him like an old friend. "Hey Zacchaeus, come down outta that tree, I'm staying at your place tonight."

There is no doubt in my mind the Zacchaeus had encountered Jesus before he climbed that tree, he had heard about this God-man Jesus traveling through the countryside and had encountered him already—in his heart, he was just waiting for him to show up. And what a powerful encounter it was. Zacchaeus declares that “Here and now!” I am going to help those less fortunate than me, and if I have cheated anyone I have going to make it right. “ Here and now!”

If we could all be like Zacchaeus and change our lives with such enthusiasm. If you notice Zacchaeus does this in spite of what his neighbors are saying doesn't he? ..... they are all complaining about him and calling him a sinner. But the way Zacchaeus responds is just the way Jesus would like us to respond. He uses the power of Christ to change his life. Now that Zacchaeus has repented he can live up to his name...which incidentally means “the pure one.” That's right the name Zacchaeus means “the pure one.”

And blessed are the pure of heart for they shall see God.

And he did, didn't he? He let go of what was making him impure and made room for the lord in his heart and in his home.

This can happen for us as well, when we truly encounter Jesus in the heart. How do we do that? First we have to extend an invitation. Invite Christ into your heart and your life. The results may not be so dramatic as Zacchaeus, we may not find ourselves running and climbing trees. But the invitation will work. God is faithful and he loves us. Because we were made by him and for him— his name is written on our hearts.