

What stops us in our tracks? A fire? A cute baby, or a dog? A pricey automobile, or a sunset?

Luke tells us that Jesus "intended" to pass through Jericho. But he is stopped in his tracks. Not because the latest and swiftest chariot was passing through. Not because of a cute two-year-old.

What stops him in his tracks is the silly sight of a grown man, a "wealthy man," up in a sycamore tree, of all things. That stopped Jesus in his tracks. This silly little man, was no friend of the citizens of the town, he was ridiculed, and ostracized because he was a tax collector.

And we are reminded that the Tax collectors were Jewish men who collected taxes for the Romans. They knew the local scene. They knew who had a good harvest and how many goats and sheep a shepherd had. They knew how much they could collect, every last shekel. What they took from the local Jewish population would go to supply arms and support for the Roman oppressors. So the locals would not have liked Zacchaeus one bit. It would have delighted them to point at Zacchaeus in the sycamore and scorn, "Look at that foolish tax collector – all his money and he's making a fool of himself!"

But when Jesus saw Zacchaeus he stopped in his tracks simply because he is "seeking to see who Jesus was." That got Jesus' attention.

Zacchaeus was a seeker for he came out hoping to see Jesus. Maybe he was tired with his way of life? Tired even of the wealth and all it could provide? **While Zacchaeus had what he wanted, he didn't have what he needed – an honest life and good relations in his community. He did not have the respect of his neighbors.**

Even though Zacchaeus was not a model of repentance, calling out for forgiveness like the tax collector in last Sunday's Gospel, **"who could not even raise his eyes to heaven, and who prayed be merciful to me a sinner,"** nevertheless Jesus took the initiative. **Jesus stopped and** nudged Zacchaeus along. He invited himself to the sinner's home.

As we can see **this upset the "good folks of Jericho."** Here we go again, **Jesus eats and drinks with sinner.** And again Jesus **"breaks bread"** and in doing so he invited him to enter a sacred space.

For us Catholics, breaking bread is an obvious symbol. For when Jesus breaks bread with us in a sacred meal reconciliation and the forgiveness of sins takes place.

And furthermore, when Jesus saw the seeker and took the first step. He didn't measure how much Zacchaeus had prepared himself. He didn't require a public proclamation of faith, or a "perfect act of contrition." Jesus filled in the gaps and missing parts and entered Zacchaeus' home and his life. And some of the most profound words in all of Scripture is utter by Jesus! "Today salvation has come to this house." When Zacchaeus welcomed Jesus into his life. (We know that experience.) Life changes.

Zacchaeus was not perfect; he was unfinished, scattered and lost. But God's Spirit nudged him to leave his home that day and become a seeker. He thought he was just going to see Jesus with his eyes but when Jesus saw Zacchaeus he stopped in his tracks, accepted him exactly as he was and entered his life. Jesus saw him, and loved him. Often in confession, a penitent will come in who has not been to the sacrament in a long time...I always peeks my interest, and often I'll ask, why today of all days, did you get up from you home and come to seek out Jesus, in confession? The answer is always some movement of the spirit that urged them to take a step out in faith.

So profound is this experience, that conversion, a new path of living begins.

"Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over."

Zacchaeus was forever changed!

But what about the townsfolk? Again Jesus turns the tables, Zacchaeus who was a sinner, a tax collector, is now in, he is justified.

And the townspeople are out! Again like last Sunday, the Tax Collection went home righteous, while the Pharisee did not. And the folks of Jericho did not! Because like last Sunday, while the Tax Collector was looking in the right direction of God, the Pharisee was looking at himself.

This Sunday the tax collector was looking the right direction seeking Jesus and the citizens of Jericho we not. The good folks of Jericho were looking at the tax collector and not at Jesus.

In this great moment of conversion and reconciliation, **Jesus came to dwell in the house of Zacchaeus.** That always means, what St. John describes in the 1st Chapter of his Gospel, **“and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”** He pitched His tent, His tabernacle to stay among us.

As he did for Zacchaeus, Jesus also wants to come home with us. He wants to dwell in your house. To pitch his tent in you, as to make you a tabernacle for God to dwell.

What Zacchaeus experienced we want as well; we want Jesus to see us, to love us, to be reconciled with us and finally to make his dwelling there.

But the lesson the last two Sundays are the same, this cannot happen, if we are looking in the wrong direction, either at ourselves or another sinner pointing fingers. We need to see ourselves as sinners and in need and then let Jesus, work in us, by coming into our lives.

Eyes on Jesus, hearts open and a contrite spirit, allows Jesus to proclaim,

Today salvation has come to your house!

Amen