**10/30/22**

**Reformation Sunday**

**Luke 19:1-10**

Last Sunday we had a little bit of a last minute shuffle. Thankfully, Pastor Jeff tells me has been recovering and feeling better. Praise God for that! However, he never expected to have to call out from Preaching due to something that has changed every one of our lives for nearly three years now. COVID has had us be frustrated at times, and it has provided us with more time for reflection. It has also had us be more willing than ever to step up and support one another, and pray for one another. In the wake of this Heather decided to tag in and take on the responsibility of preparing a sermon. She did a wonderful job while teaching us about humility. We were reminded that “God does not want our relationship with him to be like that of the Pharisee. He instead calls us to be like the Tax Collector, to recognize that we are sinners and to repent our sins and seek mercy and forgiveness. As Christians we are called to be humble and to make God our focus in our lives, in our prayers, in all that we do.” (2)

Today we have a lot to unpack. We have the awesome realization that we have arrived at yet another Reformation Sunday, some 500 years later. We also don’t want to glance over or dismiss the lesson provided to us from our Gospel Reading either. However, as we start to forge forward, I also want to press pause, and take this moment to go back to our Gospel Acclamation. We get to celebrate over the opportunity we have to learn together with one another as we explore and rejoice in our faith. So, why don’t we say it together once again, but in a more enthusiastic voice! Ready??? Here we go!!! “Alleluia. If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free. Alleluia.” (1) How awesome of a message is that??? Plain, simple, and straightforward; yet with the depth and prominence that we as children of God are blessed to have!!!

Alright, let’s unpack our Gospel Reading first, and see if I can pull some of my magic, and find a way to get both topics to intertwine and relate somehow. Well, here goes nothing!

So, Jesus is walking through Jericho and this fella named Zacchaeus happens to be hanging out in a tree like a little kid. Now, yes his stature is for sure why he climbed that tree, but I do not believe it was the only reason. The first point to come across to us was that he was trying to see what this Jesus was all about. Secondly, I believe he climbed that tree because his childlike faith and heart were yearning for more. And, that was whether he realized it or not. Now, to top it all off, I really don’t believe he expected Jesus to even spot him, let alone stop and call him down from the tree. Furthermore, he did not expect him to say that he wanted to come hang out with him as a guest in his home.

Now, let’s put some perspective on this story here. “Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector. He was a rich and powerful man. He lived a lifestyle that many people admired, and of which they were envious. Though on the surface Zacchaeus appeared to have it “made in the shade,” he obviously sensed that something was missing in his life. Driven by his emptiness—his lack of balance—he pushed his way through the crowd and climbed a tree (certainly something very degrading for a man of his position) in order to see Jesus.” (7)

Again, the even cooler thing about this story is that we get to hear that Zacchaeus was spotted, and called down from the tree by Jesus. But, his reaction was the awesome thing too. Zacchaeus “…hurried down and was happy to welcome him. (verse 6)” (1) He hurried!!! He knew that he got the attention of the one and only Savior!!! He drastically changed his role and focus on life, and was willing to right his wrongs. He was willing to donate things to the poor. Zacchaeus becomes a model of discipleship! This was not the same man that was on the ground before going up that tree! Now, who would figure that climbing a sycamore tree would have such a significant impact on one’s life. But it did!!! “The change that occurred in Zacchaeus’ life was so notable that it made the pages of the Bible.” (7) And how awesome is that?!?! We are constantly reminded that, “God’s grace overlooks no one.” (6)

Now, speaking of change, or impact! We get this devout friar or monk that would change the scope of Catholicism and the Christian Church overall. Now let’s be clear here! Martin Luther wanted to right the wrongs in the church and get things back on track. And, as I continually remind our group in Lutheranism 101, Luther had no intent to even start his own following. He even said, “The first thing I ask is that people should not make use of my name, and should not call themselves Lutherans, but Christians. What is Luther? The teaching is not mine. Nor was I crucified for anyone. St. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 3, would not tolerate Christians calling themselves Pauls or Peters, but only Christians…” (5)

The Reformation was a movement, and he only wanted to be an instrument in it. As he did not need the credit, or want the focus to be on him. His intent was to sharpen the focus of the church while refocusing it back on the Word and God. He is again quoted as saying, ““In short, I will preach it, teach it, write it, but I will constrain no one by force, for faith must come freely without compulsion. Take myself as an example. I opposed indulgences and all the papists, but never with force. I simply taught, preached and wrote God’s Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philipp and Amsdorf, the Word … did everything.”” (5) Again, let me reiterate this point here, “Martin Luther did not think of himself as a reformer of the church. He felt that that job belonged only to Jesus Christ; Luther was merely a John the Baptist, pointing to the Lamb of God.” (4)

So we focus on the fact that, “Luther’s chief concern for the church was how bad the preaching was.” In that effect we get offered to us (4) “The Freedom of a Christian, which is one of Martin Luther’s most popular writings and a classic of Christian spirituality. In it, Luther presents the most important themes of the Christian faith in a simple and clear way.” (3) “Luther taught that all human beings are created in God’s image and therefore are inherently good. Yet human nature is distorted because of our bondage to sin, which results in the breakdown of community and in injustices and evil.” (3) “The good news is that God’s ultimate response to sin is not punishment but healing, reconciliation and liberation. The word of God has the power to set us free and to empower us to work for the healing and liberation of creation and our neighbors.” (3) “Love begets love. It’s impossible for true faith not to yield abundant fruits of love because it is by faith that we awaken to God’s abundant love for us in Christ—and love wants to love.” (3) “The freedom of a Christian is the faith that we are accepted—even as unacceptable as we are, that God loves us with a parent’s fathomless love, and that even our feeble efforts at planting seeds of love will yield abundant fruits of justice and peace, because even though the concrete form that love takes is up to us, the harvest belongs to God. That is the freedom of a Christian.” (3)

“Jesus came to seek and to save the lost – the lost, that is us by nature. Jesus saw what had happened to us – how sin was sucking us under, drowning us in guilt and pulling us away for eternity from God. And so what did Jesus do? He left the glory of heaven and entered our world with an all-consuming love to search for us.” (6) “An essential understanding of God’s movement in our lives is that God has given us the gifts and talents that we have, placed us in the situation that we are in, at this specific time, for a unique ministry. God calls each and every one of us to a ministry that only we can fulfill. Each and every one of us is vital to proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ and expanding the Kingdom of God.” (7)

 Some of us might feel we are in the position of Zacchaeus at times, and need to climb a tree and change our vision and perspective on life. While some of us might feel as if we are in the position of Luther. We might feel that we need to take a stand for change, and we may feel we are vital in the growth and development of the faith. I am here to remind you that no matter what role you decide to play, no matter what position you feel you are in, they are all vital in the growth and development of His Kingdom. So, no need to be shy, step up and you do you. For without you, your vision, your commitment, and your heart we are simply nothing. We as a church are a body of believers in action, and that is and will always be our call. Climb a sycamore tree or take a stand, it is needed in the continued advancement of the faith!

AMEN

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 Contributed by Kevin Ruffcorn on Aug 10, 2006

 Scripture: Luke 19:1-10

 Denomination: Lutheran

**Luke 19:1-10**

Jesus encounters Zacchaeus, a rich man who is also a lost sinner. Moved by Jesus’ acceptance of him, Zacchaeus becomes a model of discipleship. In immediate response to being restored to God’s people, Zacchaeus ministers to the poor and seeks reconciliation with those whom he has wronged.

1[Jesus] entered Jericho and was passing through it.2A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. 3He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. 4So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. 5When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” 6So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. 7All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.” 8Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” 9Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. 10For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”