

Proper 26 C  
St. Luke 19:1-10  
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St. George's Bolton  
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## Lost & Found

*"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*

Lost. Sometimes we know we are lost and are looking for our way out of the woods and back home. At other times, we have no idea that we are lost at all. We are so caught up in the moment and what we are doing, we have no idea how lost we truly are.

People who are lost are people that we can look upon and easily feel superior. They often have made very visible mistakes with their lives, and some remain content to revel in their bewildered state. It is easy to judge people who seem unwilling to help themselves in our inner private thoughts.

It would seem that is what is happening in today's gospel passage. Zacchaeus has chosen the vocation of tax collector, which in first century Palestine was a role held in great contempt by most people. Do I need to tell you how tax collector's not only collected the heavy Roman taxes, but also added to them with their own demands, pocketing the money to make themselves rich? They were seen as traitors to the rest of the Jews, their own people. Roman's used Jews to collect taxes, thinking they would be more effective at ferreting out what people owed, and mistakenly assumed that paying their Roman tax to a fellow countryman would make it easier to swallow.

It is not hard to see how tax collectors were relegated to the role of “*amongst the worst sinners.*” Kind of like politicians in our modern society, in the view of many, I suppose. But of course, there are many sinners and worse sinners than this. For many they either are unaware of their sinfulness, or, if aware, don’t care.

An important detail of this story not to be overlooked is the fact that Zacchaeus has no clue who this Jesus is that he is about to meet. He hears a commotion on the streets of Jericho and goes out to check out what is happening. It is an understandable human reaction. He is not looking to be found. He hasn’t a clue he needs to be saved. From what, he might have asked?

So he did not know Jesus. But Jesus knew him. Jesus looks up in the tree and addresses him by name. He is anything but forgotten by God. Though he has strayed, God has sought him out.

He is a child of Abraham He is one of the flock. But simply being in the flock is not enough. Separate yourself from the sheep and you are at peril –peril of becoming supper for a wolf. God found the sheep who had strayed and invited him back into the fold.

You are really lost when you know better than to do what is not only wrong, but you do it against the wishes of God and you are hurtful to others, but you keep on doing it because either you don’t care, or you feel playing by the new rules is fun and fulfills your fantasies. Such is the magnetism of sin and temptation.

Sin isn’t the only thing that can make us feel lost. You can feel lost if you lose a job and don’t know your next move: what

should I do next? What will happen to me? You can feel greatly lost when a loved one dies or when a relationship ends. Again, we wonder, what can I do? Will I be able to live through and beyond this? And there is feeling lost in the middle of a troubling relationship that feels like it is dragging you down, or feeling lost in a job that you dislike or find your self burned out in.

And there is feeling spiritually lost. You wander far afield from you spiritual roots and abandon this important part of who you are. You get busy and stay busy, plodding your way through life, so you won't have to think about matters spiritual. Of what importance is that to me? What good will being spiritual or tending to things spiritual do for me? Such words hint of a situation of *being* lost and wandering, perhaps more lost than we know.

And then Jesus comes walking down the street. People are excited to see him. Zacchaeus climbs a sycamore tree to have a better look because he is short. And Jesus stops and engages him in a simple conversation: *"Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.'*" For Zacchaeus, a man living rejected on the margins of society, this was a blessing that lifted him up in front of all those who looked down upon him. He was redeemed on the spot, and his response was a quick one: *"So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly."* He was excited. He was changed. Though his peers muttered against him, because Jesus had chosen to stay in the home of a sinner, his response was quick and clear and righteous: *"Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."* Old Testament Biblical law only required that you give back twice

for what you cheated another, but Zacchaeus doubles that amount to four times the money taken. These are the words of a man who was lost, and is found, a man who no longer wants to live in the misdeeds of his past, but wants the new life Jesus is holding forth to him.

It is easy to point the finger at others and look down, thinking you are better than they. But when you do, you are blind to yourself. Pay heed to the story of Zacchaeus. I was blind, but now I see.

I am reminded here of my favorite passage in Matthew chapter 25. Jesus suggests to the disciples that they have an opportunity to minister to him in the face of those in need:

*“I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ “The King will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”*

Now imagine yourself walking down the street and bumping into Jesus. Maybe it is a person collecting for charity outside the market. Maybe Jesus is walking down the street with a bag of cans and bottles over his shoulder. Maybe it is someone sitting in a wheelchair in a nursing home. Maybe it is someone sitting in a prison cell waiting for a visit. Maybe Jesus is just sitting by himself, looking lonely. Maybe Jesus will walk up to the Foodshare truck on this Tuesday, head hung down, to collect a bag of food. There are many opportunities to bump

into Jesus, but many times we just pass him by, God hoping we will recognize him the next time we walk this way. Today, Jesus is inviting himself into your house, into your life. How will you respond?

Whether we feel lost or are aware of our wandering, God will find us. God goes looking for us. And when God touches our lives, things change, like they did for Zacchaeus. Like removing a dark pair of sunglasses we have worn indoors, they are lifted from our brow and the light of God pours in. We see what we did not see. And what dragged us down is lifted from our shoulders and replaced with the yoke of Jesus, which is easy and light. *I was lost, but now am found*, like the old hymn says.

It should not be lost on us that this lesson speaks to our personal stewardship of what God has given to us. "And of your own have we given you, my Lord." We brought nothing into the world, and it is sure we will take nothing material out of the world. What we do with what we have been entrusted makes all the difference. It is found treasure. AMEN