

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
 East Moline, Illinois  
 Pastor Becky Sherwood  
**November 3, 2019, All Saints' Sunday**  
 Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4, Luke 19:1-10  
**TREE CLIMBING SAINTS**

As we gather on this All Saints' Sunday, we are here to celebrate the saints of God who sit beside us and the saints of God who have gone Home into Heaven before us.

Saints are not just religious world leaders, people with books written about them, people with days that commemorate them, people who shaped human history.

In the Bible, saints are all the people who follow Jesus. Saints are you and me.

Saints are the people who have shaped our history in our families, among our friends, our teachers, our pastors, our neighbors and those surprising people God has placed in our lives.

We gather today with the people whose names are on these banners, and we gather with our family and friends we carry in our hearts this day.

The Rev. Thom Shuman from Ohio, whose words we often use in worship, captures this day with the prayer that is on the front of your bulletin:

**Prayer for All Saints' Sunday**

If we would but listen, we could hear them:

the bus driver who sang school songs with us,  
 and the coach who whispered encouragement  
 before sending us in to play.

the teacher who never gave up on us,  
 and the friend who talked to us when no one else would.

If we could but look, we could see them:

the grandfather with dimpled knees from playing marbles  
 with the neighborhood kids,  
 and the nana with nicked hands from hammering  
 nails for affordable housing;

the crossing guard who always stepped in front  
 of traffic before we could,  
 and the couple who have not stopped holding hands  
 Since they first said "I do."

If we would but pay attention, we could learn from them:

the single mother who opened up the world  
 of reading to a new generation,  
 and the nurse up sat by our child's bed  
 after her shift ended;

those who fought dragons in ancient tales,  
 and those who face drug dealers on street corners.

The saints are all around us, so make us mindful of them,  
 God in Community, Holy in One...

--The Rev. Thom Shuman, [lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com](http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com)

Surrounded by the saints sitting with us and those who have gone before us, and the many like Thom Shuman names, we gather on this day with a tax collector from Jericho long ago who wanted

to see Jesus.

Some of us grew up singing about him in Sunday School, “Zacchaeus was a wee little man, a wee little man we he, he climbed up in a sycamore tree for the Lord he wanted to see.”

Zacchaeus climbed the sycamore tree because Jericho was crowded that day. The teacher, healer and miracle worker Jesus was coming through town, and Luke says that Zacchaeus was trying to see who Jesus was, but he was (quote) “short of stature.”

There may have been a couple other reasons Zacchaeus went up into that tree that day. The story tells us that Zacchaeus was rich and he was the chief tax collector. These two facts from his life tell us that he was not a beloved member of the community.

Zacchaeus may have wanted to have some distance between himself and the crowd that day. Tax collectors were despised by their Jewish neighbors (They were Jews, but they had sold out to the Roman government who ruled the region. They were considered unpatriotic traitors to their own people.

Boring, M. Eugene and Fred B. Craddock, *The People’s New Testament Commentary*, p. 197.)

Tax collectors collected taxes from their neighbors for Rome, the ruling foreign government.

They were known for raising the tax rates higher than what was owed so they had extra money for themselves.

If Zacchaeus was a rich tax collector, he had gotten rich by exploiting his neighbors.

And he was the *chief* tax collector, which means he was also taking money from the other tax collectors.

This was a man without friends;  
think IRS agent, cheating other IRS agents, working for an occupying nation, with no laws governing how much he could take from his own people.

So, while the tree gave Zacchaeus a good vantage point to see over the crowd, the branches and leaves of that sycamore tree may have also been hiding him from the eyes of his neighbors who hated and despised him.

But this isn’t just a story about Zacchaeus, it’s a story about Jesus.

Jesus who finds climbers of trees,

Jesus who loves and saves climbers of trees,

Jesus who can bring healing to climbers of trees.

In the crush of the crowd in Jericho that day no one else probably noticed that rich, chief tax collector Zacchaeus in the tree, peering out over the crowd, but Jesus did.

Jesus stopped, he reached up and shook the branches of that sycamore tree and he said, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down NOW; because I must come home with you and stay at your house today.”

And when Zacchaeus came down out of that tree he was changed.

He was changed by Love that saw him,

changed by Love that reshaped what his heart desired,

changed by Love that gave him the power to choose a new path,

Because Jesus “came to seek out and to save the lost.”

On this All Saints' Sunday we are here because Zacchaeus and the saints who came after him, chose to follow Jesus. They chose to let Jesus reshape their lives. They chose to show us what living saints look like.

As Thom Shuman reminds us, God has spoken in our lives through bus drivers, coaches, and teachers. God has entered our lives through parents and grandparents and crossing guards and nurses and those who read to us. God has filled our lives with living saints.

This is a day we gather to celebrate, and give God thanks, for the ways our own Sunday School teachers, youth leaders and pastors here and around the country, and parents and grandparents, and the people who have faithfully served this church whose names are on these banners, and those saints who sit beside us, have shaped our lives and shown us the loving face of Jesus, by being living saints in our lives.

This is a day to say thank you to God for the ways people have told us the stories of faith so we can tell them to others.

This is the day to give thanks for the living saints who believed in us even when we were hiding up in trees, saints who showed us kindness, who welcomed us in the church hallways, who listened to us at fellowship time, who did activities with us in Sunday School and Vacation Bible school. This is a day to say thank you for the saints who led us in church choirs and sang or rang beside us.

This is the day to give thanks to God for the living saints in our families of birth, and families of choice, who have shaped our lives with love.

This is the day to celebrate the wise saints in the church who've shown us what it looks like to serve those in need, to give voice to the voiceless, to see and know the names of children and youth, and to believe that Jesus' love has the power to change lives, even ours!

It is through those saints who've gone before us, and the saints who fill our lives, and the saints we sit with in this sanctuary that we are shown the pathways of living sainthood.

This is the day to say thank you to God that we are invited to be saints in the Kingdom of God. May we learn from the wise teachers we honor this day,  
as we recognize the ways Jesus has found us,  
come home with us,  
and then sent us out into a world that needs living saints.

May our lives reflect the love we have been given in Jesus,  
because we too are saints in the Kingdom of God!