

LITTLE MAN UP A TREE

A SERMON FOR ORDINARY TIME
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2013
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
MARIANNA, FLORIDA
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LUKE 19:1-10

Do you ever think about making a movie or a television program out of a story from the Bible? I do it all the time. I still think that the Bible has tremendous potential for television, and that it would be a whole lot better than most of what is on now, and would be a good way of spreading the gospel.

When I think about making a television program out of the story of Zacchaeus, there is but one person who could play the part: Danny DeVito!

Can't you see him now, running and hopping along trying to see over the crowd? Can't you see the crowd coming together, denying him access, keeping him from seeing Jesus? Can't you see him in desperation climbing a sycamore tree, perching on a branch, looking out over the crowd, maybe gloating a little that he overcame their obstruction, so that he could see Jesus?

And then, wonder of wonder, Jesus invites himself over for dinner!

In the time of Jesus and Zacchaeus, tax collectors were despised, hated. Well, let's face it, no one wants to pay taxes. And the taxes imposed by the Romans were particularly offensive to the Jews, for they had to pay with coins bearing the image of Caesar, which to them broke the commandment about graven images. As far as the Jews were concerned, the only taxes they should pay were their tithes to the temple, and the Romans were seeking tribute that should have been made to God. The Jews who collaborated with the Romans, and became tax collectors like Zacchaeus, were social outcasts, idolaters, sinners of the worst sort.

But in spite of that, Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus. He wanted to see this Messiah, this Prophet, this Preacher. Was it curiosity? Was Zacchaeus seeking just a glimpse of a celebrity, as we might if the President or the Pope came to our town? Or was Zacchaeus seeking something more? Was he seeking forgiveness? Was he seeking a relationship with Jesus?

Whatever Zacchaeus, the little man up a tree, was seeking, Jesus was seeking him. Jesus saw him, and said, "Come down from there right now! I'm going to your house today!"

Now this is just one of the many times and many ways that Jesus defied the accepted practices and standards of His day. A good Jew would never enter the home of such a sinner. Zacchaeus dealt with the unclean coins of the unclean Romans, and so his person and his property were unclean, forbidden to be touched or approached by a righteous Jew.

And the most righteous person who ever lived, called Zacchaeus down from the tree and went to his house and ate at his table.

Zacchaeus was transformed. A wealthy man, he gave half of what he had to charity, and stood ready to make restitution four-fold if he had cheated any man. Now that last is totally within keeping with Old Testament Law, and is a mark of true repentance on the part of the sinner who just a little while before was a little man up a tree.

What would it mean if Jesus came to Marianna, Florida? There was a homecoming parade a week or so ago, and there will be a Veterans Day Parade a week from tomorrow. What if Jesus showed up for a parade through the streets of Marianna?

Would you go to see Him? Would you climb a tree to be able to see Him? And what if He called out to you and said, "Come down from there, I'm coming to your house today"?

Well, I want to tell you that Jesus was here for the Homecoming Parade, and He'll be here for the Veterans Day Parade, and more importantly, He's here this morning. And He isn't just saying to you that He will go home from church with you, because He will go home with you, and He is already there waiting for you as well, Jesus is saying, "This is my table spread for you." Jesus is saying, "This is the heavenly banquet." Jesus is saying, "This is my body and my blood." Jesus is saying "I am here with you, I am here in you, I am at your house, your job, on the streets and sidewalks with you, I'm with you always."

And Jesus is saying, "It doesn't matter how many or how grievous your sins, it doesn't matter how much you have been hated and despised and rejected and ridiculed and mocked by others, I love you, I forgive you, and I want to be your best friend forever. "

So come, come to the table, come take and eat, come be blessed, for Jesus Christ invites you to His table, and will come to your house today.