

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

11.3.19

Wisdom 11: 22-12:2; 2 Thessalonians 1: 11-2:2

Luke 19: 1-10

MAKE ROOM FOR THE UNEXPECTED GUEST

I spent four years in Washington, DC, studying theology. The winters were bleak with all of the barren trees, the cold and damp weather and gray, gray cloudy skies - we often did not glimpse the sun for over six weeks! But spring in DC is spectacular with the cherry blossoms and all the carefully cultivated flowers and plants blooming one after another. So my first spring there I decided to take some pictures of the flowers to get me through the next winter. One day I was lying on the ground in a traffic circle to get the blue sky as a background behind some daffodils and I heard someone say: "Hello Paul." It was one of my theology professors: an elderly, very dignified priest.



With a lot of people I might have felt embarrassed as a grown man to be discovered lying in the dirt taking pictures of flowers, but I knew he would approve and even be delighted.

What might have motivated Zacchaeus to climb that tree? Yes, he was short of stature and wanted to gain a better vantage point and perhaps, as a tax collector, he was so outcast that people would not have made room for him; but why should he, a wealthy and accomplished man, care anything about this carpenter from Nazareth? What made him willing to appear so ridiculous that as a grown man he climbed up into a tree in order to be able to see Jesus? We don't often imagine wealthy, influential people climbing trees - they would generally instead make large contributions

and expect priority seating or maybe expect people to yield to them or perhaps would pay for someone else to go and then make a report. Yet apparently Zacchaeus just wanted desperately to glimpse Jesus himself. He had somehow come to recognize something in Jesus and within himself. And he just had to act on it no matter what it might cost him.



Most of us would have become embarrassed by the attention Jesus focused in our direction while we were clinging to a tree. We might have reacted angrily and refused to come down from the tree. Yet Zacchaeus sensed that Jesus was delighted in his behavior, so much so that Jesus invited himself to dinner. So Zacchaeus hurried down and welcomed Jesus into his home. He had not planned to host Jesus in his home, but he was willing to change his plans for the day and make room for this unexpected opportunity to be with Jesus.

As we heard in the first reading, to God the whole universe is a grain in the balance, a drop of morning dew upon the earth. It is curious that while God oversees so much so patiently that we sometimes may get upset over what really amounts to very little. We need to be able to laugh at ourselves and at life when a situation is ridiculous because it helps us to keep our lives in a better perspective. Each week we come here, to this place, to discover again the familiar and important truth: that, while we all are sinners, we are all precious to God and God never leaves our side -- though we sometimes may wander far away from God and sometimes may be hesitant to return. We are all called to confess our sins to God. God already knows them and simply wants for us to confess them and ask for his help, mercy, forgiveness and grace, because God loves us and all

things that are, and wants nothing to separate us from God. God wants nothing to come between us and God.

There's an old story about a young boy who, frightened by a thunderstorm, was sobbing and his father came in to his room. "Son," his father said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here, but don't you know that God is always with you and you don't have to be afraid?" "Yes, Daddy," the boy replied. "But sometimes I need someone with skin on."



Even though God is present everywhere in everything, we, too, sometimes need someone with skin on and so God took on our human flesh so we could come to know, love and serve him. God has his own skin in the game and was personally willing to suffer and die for us! Jesus came to save us and bring us closer to God and to one another. We have the community of the Church to help us to aid and support one another when our personal storms or trials come and we need someone with skin on.

All of us are gathered here today because we want to somehow see Jesus, to be with Jesus. We may or may not be willing to be seen as fools for our faith, but all of us are here because we want to see Jesus. We need to identify what it is in our lives that might hinder us from seeing Jesus and then seek to overcome those obstructions. What can we do in our daily lives, where can we go, in order to get a better perspective in order to see Jesus? Setting aside a daily time for quiet meditation or spiritual reading, having a conversation with someone who will be brutally and lovingly honest with us, engaging in a service project that addresses an urgent need, embracing the unexpected interruptions in our day and the

Sacrament of Penance are just a few of the possibilities. Each day we all need to look for Jesus, no matter what obstacles might be in our way, no matter how ridiculous we may appear or feel acknowledging or surmounting them. We need to do whatever we need to do to surmount the obstacles that block out Jesus, for whatever reason. We need to do whatever we need to do so that we allow nothing to be between God and us.

The scriptures invite each of us to strive to be worthy of our calling. We are called to admit how much we need God and one another. We need to be humble enough to ask for help when we feel lost or afraid and humble enough to accept correction however it may come to us and to be able to laugh at ourselves. We need to allow our schedules to be interrupted whenever the Kingdom of God breaks into our lives so we can acknowledge and delight in it as Jesus did! With God's grace may we be willing to climb trees, swim oceans, run races, or drop everything we are doing in order to help make Jesus better known, loved and served. May God be blessed.

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