Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“He ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus, who was about to pass that way” (Luke 19:3).

Rev 3:1-6, 14-22; Luke 19:1-10

The story of Zacchaeus is a favorite Gospel story, especially for children, because it is so rich in small details that reveal something about what happens when we encounter Jesus. Zacchaeus is both a “big” man in Jericho because of his wealth and a “little” man in the estimation of his neighbors because of his role as a tax collector. There is something comical about seeing him climb a tree to see over the crowds awaiting Jesus. Yet there is something deeply serious in his desire to “see” this prophet everyone was talking about, how he defied the priests by eating with sinners and preaching God’s mercy.

Something wonderful happens. Jesus looks up into the tree and “sees” Zacchaeus. The Gospels note that when Jesus looked intently at people he sees into their hearts. His look of love had a transforming effect. Jesus calls Zacchaeus down from the tree and invites himself to his house. The crowd is taken aback that Jesus will dine with this public sinner, but Zacchaeus is thrilled and on the spot pledges to give half his wealth to the poor and to repay fourfold any money he has extorted. Jesus rejoices that salvation has come to this son of Abraham and to his house.

Luke reminds us at the start of the story that Jesus is passing through Jericho on his way to Jerusalem. The encounter with Zacchaeus holds a beautiful symbolism in having him up in a tree, for Jesus is on his way to another tree, the tree of the cross,

and what occurs is the trading of places between sinner and savior. Jesus is about to complete the prophecy of Isaiah's "Suffering Servant" by taking on himself the sins of the world. We are witnessing the Gospel in miniature, for in every encounter Jesus trades places with the sinners, outcast, rejected, wounded and damaged people he meets along the way.

The story also reminds us that Zacchaeus initiated the encounter with Jesus, who was passing by. The first movement of faith is in him, as it was for so many of the people Jesus saved. They heard he was passing by and sought him out, with wonderful results. So is it for us. Jesus is passing by. Do I want to see him? What obstacles am I be willing to overcome to see him? Would I climb a tree on the chance that he will see me and come to my house today?

In today's first reading, we hear this invitation: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, then I will enter their house and dine with them, and they with me" (Rev 3: 21).

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