Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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Pencil Preaching will be on the road from Nov. 17 to 21. Posts will resume on Monday, Nov. 22.

“He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner” (Luke 19:6).

2 Macc 6:18-31; Luke 19:1-10

Like other parables, the story of Zacchaeus, the diminutive tax collector who climbs a tree to see Jesus, has its own inexhaustible potential for reflection.

I would like to focus on something that is in many of the Gospel stories about people coming to discipleship. It has to do with a threshold they cross that costs them something to draw closer to Jesus, who is himself on a journey that appears to be one of increasing powerlessness, a paradoxical descent described as loss for gain, cross for glory.

Consider Zacchaeus. Small in stature, despised for his profession and compromised as a Jew for dealing with the occupying Romans, he is nonetheless a wealthy man with power over others. We can imagine his concern for stature and importance to make up for other deficits, and his efforts to assert his dignity, even if he is buying influence and intimidating others to "respect" him.

His desire to “see” Jesus is a response to a grace-filled invitation to regain right relationships and personal integrity through repentance. It reduces Zacchaeus to an almost childlike eagerness. He runs alongside the crowd as Jesus approaches. He tries to get to the front row but is likely elbowed and pushed back by people who see

their chance to show contempt.

So, Zacchaeus gathers up his robes and climbs a tree. It is an astonishing sight, this grown man up in the sycamore tree, and no doubt people in the crowd hooted at him. But Jesus does not; he instead meets Zacchaeus’ willingness to surrender his dignity to begin his conversion journey with mercy by calling him down and proposing dinner at his house to continue the grace of the moment.

An act of humility opens up Zacchaeus' heart, the same first step toward deeper discipleship we find in Peter’s failure, Paul’s conversion when knocked to the ground and blinded, or the Prodigal Father’s surrender of patriarchal dignity to run to embrace and kiss his returning son. Zacchaeus begins his journey home by being up a tree and out on a limb for Jesus. God does the rest. The cost of discipleship seems high because we so value our pride and control, but surrender sets us free to become our true selves again, before God, self and other people. No small blessing.

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