

Zacchaeus is not just short of stature. He is a chief tax collector, tops in his region. As a tax collector, he is a collaborator with the Empire. He extracts heavy taxes against his own people and has gotten rich adding on an ample sum for himself. He is accordingly a chief sinner. He is Jewish but is banished from the synagogue and temple and shunned, even hated, by the whole town. There was more than one reason for Zacchaeus to run ahead and climb up in a tree. He would not be welcome in the crowd. So, he ran ahead and climbed to avoiding being seen by them and the probable harassment and being pushed around, maybe even bodily harm which might befall him in the close quarters of a crowd.

Zacchaeus risked exposure only because he had heard about Jesus. He had heard the stories of Jesus' healing power. The good news of Jesus' teaching and preaching was talked about even in his circle of outcasts. Perhaps, most of all, it was rumored that Jesus was a friend of sinners and tax collectors. Zacchaeus was curious and maybe seeking for someone to relieve his loneliness and to fill the great emptiness in his heart and soul. He wanted, needed, to see this Jesus.

So, there he is robes and all, climbing up into a sycamore-fig tree. He could see and not be seen because of the foliage. Besides, no one looks up when the celebrity is at eye level. If Zacchaeus was curious, he was shocked when Jesus looking up, saw him, smiled maybe. He was stupefied when Jesus said, "Zacchaeus come down for I must stay at your house today." The risk Jesus took was tremendous, the crowd that had loved him so for healing a blind man on the outskirts of town now turned against him, grumbling like the faithless Israelites did against Moses and God in the wilderness. Jesus is coming for more than dinner; he will spend the night with Zacchaeus. I. Howard Marshall in his commentary on Luke stated, "to stay in such a person's home was tantamount to sharing his sin." Jesus also took a great risk for Zacchaeus.

We do not know what happened over dinner or in the long hours of conversation that followed. Maybe it was the same thing that happened when Andrew and Simon, the disciples of John, asked Jesus where he was staying and he said, "Come and see." They too spent the entire day with him and "found the Messiah." Zacchaeus found the Messiah and he found salvation. He found acceptance, forgiveness, love, and new life. In great thanksgiving for what Jesus has done for him, he promises to give half of all his possessions to the poor. Additionally, he will pay restitution for sins against others by paying back all his had defrauded to a level far exceeding what the Jewish law demand, at 400% rather than just 20%. Zacchaeus was

filled with thankfulness for his salvation. Before all other reasons for thanksgiving in prayer and praise and giving, is the salvation we have received in Jesus our Christ. It is worth our all!

Jacob is another story. In his youth, he manipulated his hungry brother into trading his birthright for a bowl of stew. He tricked his father, Isaac, into thinking he was his older twin Esau and stole the blessing of the first born, his father's fortune. Esau wanted Jacob dead, so he fled to his uncle Laban's house. Along the way, God reached out to him at Bethel (the house of God). Receiving God's promises, he promised to give God 1/10th of all God would give to him in the future. Years later, as he starts toward home, he wrestles with God, brought on by his guilt, shame, and fear. In the morning, God blesses him again, but he comes out of it limping. From all that has happened to him, he is different than the young trickster, he once was. He comes home wealthy, with huge flocks of sheep, goats and camels, a family with many children and many others in his company. He has been greatly blessed, as we have been.

When he learns that Esau is coming toward him with 400 men, Jacob is greatly afraid. He sends out in front of him three huge droves of animals as gifts to Esau. The ending looks badly but Esau surprises. He comes running, like the father to the prodigal, and hugs his long absent brother. Then there is this interplay between the brothers; Esau refuses Jacob's gift saying, "I have enough, my brother, keep it." Jacob presses him saying, "Please accept my gift that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me and because I have everything I want."

When we gather as Christians at table on Thursday let us remember to give heartfelt thanks because God has blessed us with love and care through thick and thin. God has given us wealth, maybe not that of 1% but enough and more, maybe not all you want but enough to meet your needs and more. God has given us family, by blood and faith and mutual love. Remember what Paul teaches in the letter to the Romans: God is always working for our good. We see that in Jacob's life and ours if we just look! Remember the foundation of all our thanks and giving: God's love given in Jesus our Lord and the salvation that has come to our house as we have received him joyously. It is our thanks that is the source of our giving. The two always go together, cause and effect. As Luke Timothy Johnson remarks in his commentary, in Zacchaeus, "the gospel writer reminds us again that the disposition of the heart is symbolized by the disposition of possessions." Thanksgiving is more than a feeling issued in a table prayer; it is a rendering to God and sharing from a grateful heart.