

WHO IS YOUR ZACCHAEUS?

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So if there's any kids listening.... And I suppose adults can listen also

Some times there's someone that doesn't always fit in

Or someone that people talk about.

Or someone who people call weird

Or someone who dress differently, talks differently, or who others don't really understand

The kid no one wants to be paired up with for an assignment

The kid who is always picked last to be a part of the team

And many times no one wants to talk with them

Maybe for fear that people won't talk to you too

Maybe because you don't want to be made fun of for talking to that person

Or maybe you've felt like that person at one time or another. I know I felt like the outcast a few times growing up.

But the thing is - None of that stuff is the truth

We just sang about the truth for everyone:

That everyone has been loved by God

We sang about everyone being chosen, not forsaken

That everyone has had a place made for them

In today's story, the people around Jesus all needed to learn this lesson. Let's listen:

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I love the word magnanimous.

Maybe because it's the way it rolls off the tongue

But today I want to use it to talk about a particular kind of generosity.

Magnanimity is a generosity of spirit.

Someone who is magnanimous

Is generous with forgiveness

- Or overlooking faults
- Gives people the benefit of the doubt
- Listens not for the sake of responding but for the sake of understanding

Magnanimity is one of the ways we can seek the welfare of those around you.

And magnanimity opens the door for healing and new possibilities.

This is really what we see happening with Jesus and Zacchaeus.

As Jesus is going through Jericho

It's an important city in those days

Wealthy people lived there

Herod built himself a palace there

And just outside Jericho, Jesus has already healed a blind man to give him his sight. And now he's walking through town.

Word has gotten out and everyone wants a look at Jesus. maybe they're curious. Maybe they want to follow. Maybe they're looking to be entertained.

Zacchaeus joins in as well.

But he can't see.....not in the same way as the blind man – he can't see for another reason

He is too short to see over the crowds

Now the scripture says he can't see because he was short in stature.

But I've been to parades.

And I've let people who are shorter than me get in front of me.

So I wonder if maybe there's more to it than his stature, but it is who he is.

See, he's a tax collector

And more than that, a chief tax collector

And more than that, he's a wealthy chief tax collector

Yeah so, you might think...so he's successful.

But he's gotten that way probably by cheating people because he can get away with it.

And he's sold out to the Roman government

So it's as if he has betrayed his own people - twice

So I wonder if in that city, with a lot of the people, he's one of those folks who are left out...the last to be chosen for the team, the one to be avoided so you don't look bad yourself.

So I picture it as people simply not making room for him.

As not having generosity of spirit toward Zacchaeus.

And they probably think, rightfully so!

And then Jesus stops where Zacchaeus is and singles him out.

Jesus shows us what being generous in spirit is.

Despite who Zacchaeus is

Despite what Zacchaeus does

No matter how others raised their eyebrows and questioned his behavior

Jesus opens his heart to Zacchaeus

And I know that's a risky thing for us to do

- Opening our heart to someone like Zacchaeus might look like we are complacent with our values
- Even lead others to think that we share the same values

That's why: <sup>7</sup> All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."  
Does this mean Jesus is a "sinner" too?

No, but he is opening his heart to Zacchaeus

He is making space for Zacchaeus in his life

He is being magnanimous

He is having a generosity of spirit toward Zacchaeus....exemplified in sharing a meal with him,

And because of that, something happened inside Zacchaeus

Something shifted in his heart

The walls came tumbling down....after all, this is Jericho right?

He experienced acceptance and he changed.

This is what the good news is all about

It's not about behaving so God will love you

It's about experiencing that God loves you and having that radically changes your life

What if Jesus' followers did that? What if Jesus' followers lived with magnanimity or generosity of spirit toward others?

- They would not have turned the children away
- They would not have screened those who were seeking Jesus...like they tried with the blind beggar outside of Jericho

If Jesus' followers lived like that, they would make space for people:

They might stop using the phrase, "the problem with those people...."

they just might ask someone who has an opposing political bumper sticker, "I don't know if I agree, but can you share with me your thoughts?"

they might look a homeless person in the eye

they might provide food for a struggling immigrant

they might go to a bar and get to know "those people"

and the world just might change....

You know, sometimes I'd like to modify the mission statement of The United Methodist Church from "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world" to: "to be disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world"

So let me ask you: Who is your Zacchaeus?

How is Jesus calling you to live with generosity of spirit with your Zacchaeus?