

Twenty Fourth Sunday after Pentecost 30 October 2016

[Habakkuk 1: 1-4, 2: 1-4 ; Psalm 119: 137-144; 2 Thessalonians 1: 1-4, 11-12 ; Luke 19:1-10](#) from Vanderbilt

[Proper 26C / Ordinary 31C / Pentecost +24 Oct 30, 2016](#) from Textweek

This week's gospel really does have some good news when compared to last week's gospel; if you recall last week we heard,

"Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?",

and the clear answer,

"Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

It was a hard ask, and perhaps left many of us out of the picture.

This week, thankfully we are offered an alternative gospel, and the good news, is that we are also offered a 50% discount, for in today's gospel we hear; "*Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord,*

"Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor....."

and then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house"

What is obvious from these two gospel readings is that they are not literal accounts of what Jesus reveals; rather they are iconic pictures for us to contemplate, to ponder and to seek understanding and enlightenment from what they illuminate.

So let's look more closely at the picture of today's story of Zacchaeus.

"He [Jesus] entered Jericho and was passing through it";

Jericho is, according to the book of Joshua, the site of the first battle of the Israelites in their conquest of Canaan; it is a place therefore of destruction and creation, and represents a struggle for the movement into new life.

"A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich";

introduced as the first character in the story, we might pause to identify ourselves with Zacchaeus.

He was rich, and so too are we rich; and the writer by identifying him as a *chief tax collector* places him as someone who is in the employ of, and engaged with the state authorities.

Again we might pause and consider the authorities that we too are very much engaged with, if we voted, if we completed the census, if we have a bank account, a credit card, or use health services, electricity and public transport we too might find ourselves very much in the employment of the authorities... Perhaps we are as engaged with the authorities as Zacchaeus, or even more so....

And the contemplation of icons gives us an opportunity to contrast and compare, the relative priorities that we willingly make an engagement with; and that in turn might ask us to question our attentiveness to God, and our engagement with divine things.

The other 'characters' for us to identify with in the story are 'the crowd'; and once again we have all had experience of being in a crowd; going to a concert, shopping during the sales, or going to a football match; we all can quite easily identify ourselves with the crowd pictured in this icon, or story.

But, pause again, this is not any old crowd, for this is a crowd who had come to see Jesus; and perhaps the writer therefore is illuminating the Church, those who come together to 'see Jesus'.

Already we have two points of identification, and that enables us to discern between the two and to discover which one most readily reflects ourselves; and for that we need to follow the movement of the story.

Zacchaeus

"was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature";

perhaps we can see where we also do not measure up to the norms of the church. Most of us at some time or another experience ourselves on the outer, or as not significant when we look around us at the church, and equally, hopefully, at times we also see ourselves quite positively as different to the crowd that come to church.

As we ponder even further, do we really 'try to see Jesus', do we make an effort, or do we just stand in the crowd and wait for Jesus to pass by?

Following Zacchaeus, we hear:

"So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way."

we hear that energy was expended, there was a deliberate plan of action and a real sense of purpose in Zacchaeus, he literally went over and above the crowd.

Now he could have stood on a milk crate, but the writer names the tree, drawing our attention to its significance; asking us to contemplate what tree this is.

Perhaps the tree is the one from Genesis, in the garden of Eden, the tree of knowledge of good and evil;

the very moment of truth for humanity's birth: the tree that exposed the nakedness of Adam and Eve, the tree that reveals our truest selves.

Perhaps the tree is the one mentioned later in Genesis

"The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre";

and so represents the promise of a son, a divine birth and a future

Or perhaps this is the tree of Easter, the tree of crucifixion, and another moment of truth that opens the path to resurrection, and to a new paradigm of life.

“When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him.”;

clearly the tree that Zacchaeus climbed, that which took him away from and above the crowd was the place in which he was divinely seen.

In order for this divine recognition to take place, Zacchaeus had to leave his house, Jesus did not visit him at home: nor was he spotted in the crowd, rather Zacchaeus initiated a movement, and climbed higher than the crowd, and it was as a result of his efforts that he was able to welcome Jesus at home.

“All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.””

and perhaps that is what keeps most of us ‘in the crowd’, our fear of being recognised as different; but this verse is also a condemnation of Jesus, he was not what the crowd wanted to see, he was not what the crowd expected; and that again asks us to contemplate our wants and expectations of being church.

When Zacchaeus finds himself ‘at home’ with Jesus, nothing is asked of him, there is no commandment, no call to repent; and yet there is an amazing realisation;

“Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.””

The writer of the gospel has given us an icon to contemplate ourselves, to see more clearly the life we lead and the life revealed in Christ.

In the Old Testament tradition; the same revelations are given voice through the icon of the prophet and in answer to Habakkuk’s anguished cry, the oracle that is revealed is one of clear instructions: write the vision, make it plain, and live by faith.

These prophetic instructions might well serve us when we have fully contemplated the icon of Zacchaeus; for if we can look beyond the crowd, and if we seek vision and purpose then what follows is to commit to that which we see, and live it.

The gospel icon tells us that we are recognised in the same place, the very same position that we find Christ crucified, and that is the place of our truest and most Divine birth.

Peter Humphris