

“Hey, YOU!”
C Pentecost 23, Luke 19:1-10
October 30, 2016
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
Rev Rebecca K. Poos

I. WAS HE WEE?

“Zacchaeus was a wee little man,
and a wee little man was he!

He climbed up in a sycamore

Wait! What was that again?”

(The Message) “He wanted desperately to see Jesus, but the crowd was in his way—he was a short man and couldn’t see over the crowd.”

Wait! *Who* are we talking about? Oh, Zacchaeus! That little guy in the bible, right? We all know him. If I were to call out names of different folks in the bible, and ask you to tell me about them in one word or phrase, you’d be able to do that, right? Let’s try:

Jacob—
Noah—
Jonah—
Daniel—
Zacchaeus!

He was wee! He was short! Of course! And, where would you most likely find him? (Look at the front of your bulletin, if you’re not sure) Up a tree. Of course!

But wait.

3 And he sought to see who Jesus was, and he could not for the crowd, because he was **low of stature**.

Doesn’t say he was a “wee little man”. Once you get behind some of our modern translations. What does “low of **stature**

mean?” There’s that biblical word again! It’s a great word, but do we really *use* it anywhere else? “Jesus grew in wisdom and stature”—we read about the 12-year-old youngster. But, here it is again. What does it *mean*?

From the Greek:

hélíkiá: maturity, i.e. age

Phonetic Spelling: (hay-lik-ee'-ah) (sounds more Hawaiian than Greek!)

Definition: age, term of life; full age, maturity; stature.

II. DID HE COME UP SHORT?

Is it *possible*, that what’s come up short all these years is not Zach, but *our* lenses as we look at him? Remember how despised the Tax Collectors were in that day? Well, he was the chief collector and traitor here! Was very rich for all that scalping and grafting off the top he was doing –to his own people of his own faith, no less.

Maybe what’s *short* here is the gospel-writer’s esteem of Zach—not his physical size at all! He is *described* as lacking in the maturity and credibility department –maybe because of age, but most likely due to reputation and how he and his cronies were thought of.

Maybe like we would consider a young whippersnapper, Johnny-come lately to town business-man who hadn’t really earned his stripes the old-fashioned way. He or she might be described in the stories that are told around town as “short in stature.”

“So young; so much to learn!” (in the vernacular)

III. COMING UP SHORT

Or, could it be that Zach is *not* the one who is **short**? It says he couldn’t see **Jesus** because of the crowd. Maybe it’s **Jesus** who was short!

Or, maybe like the tax collector in last week’s story in the temple, what was **short** was Zach’s willingness to come *close*,

be *in* the crowd—either because he was short on tolerance and willingness to rub shoulders with everyone else. Or, because the crowd was short on willingness to welcome him there. To draw the circle quite that wide.

Or, is he short on courage to let go of the tree—his safe hiding place—until Jesus declares that it's Supper time and he is now the official unexpected company, tree better be vacated in a hurry!

It's one thing to be short—as in not very tall, physically. It's quite another to be short-sighted.

And, it's a *very* good question to ask WHO is short-sighted in this story? Where? How? And to ask ourselves: When and where are WE short-sighted. When Jesus wants to come to our house today, where are we hiding in a tree, peering out from the narrow space between the branches, not seeing the big picture, needing to see Jesus, by seeing ourselves and others in a different, broader light?

Shortsighted, by definition is:
unable to see far; nearsighted; myopic.
lacking in foresight:
a shortsighted plan.

IV. SHORTSIGHTED SERMON

For a minister, being shortsighted *might* mean thinking you'd better get your sermon all tidily finished by Thursday, if you're going to a weekend conference and won't have much time to write it later. So, you compile some interesting tidbits of information, some fascinating facts, some insightful, hopefully inspiring intuitions about the scripture, and get things decently in order *before* the weekend.

And that's the right thing to do, and prudent and wise. Right?

Well, it *may* be right. But it's also shortsighted. Because you might—at said conference—learn that every story in scripture

might have “the rest of the story” and the characters and message and nuggets of wisdom *might* just be found in getting *behind* the tradition we have inherited; how the story has been captured in song all these many decades or centuries (Zacchaeus was a wee little man.....), and the pearl may be found in getting behind the music and changing our lens just a wee bit!

And you might just—if you're feeling in a mood to stir things up (or like stretching out of our collective comfort zone!) throw *out* that tidy little sermon and its emphasis on repentance, and perseverating over *whether* Zach was truly contrite and willing to turn his life, job and greedy habits around because Jesus happened to stop by. And, you might look *instead* at your own short-sightedness in looking at this passage through a limited lens once again.....

And, *we* might use a little foresight, instead of “short sight,” and bring our imaginations to this story. For it brings up lots of questions, doesn't it? And, in probing into those questions, we might find far more meaning than a cute little ditty about a wee man who had an unexpected dinner guest! In this story: Who is short? Who is shortsighted?

V. SHORTSIGHTED, WE

Think about a time when you were shortsighted, and you came to regret it. When you, perhaps, *didn't* hop out of the tree, and accept the invitation to dinner? Just sang the song the way you always had, giving no thought to what it's saying; accepting that way you'd always thought of things as gospel truth?

Has there been a time, ever in your life, when you took something at face value, or written on the page in a translated language-value, and didn't think twice? Didn't dig deeper, question, wonder, or try to find out what was *behind* the story?

You're not alone! With interpreting Bible stories, songs or anything else, for that matter.

We, as a human race are shortsighted. And I fear we're getting worse every day. Technology has helped that along. For we are Tweet Culture. Living in soundbytes! You may have never tweeted in your life, or even know what Twitter IS, but think about the number of times we have all believed something— simply because it was a headline. Or a one-word or one-phrase description of something that happened or someone's action or position?

I cringe every time I see one of those charts: Candidates' Positions on Issues, and the so-called "position" is described in one or two words: For/Against gun control, higher taxes, tax breaks, public lands, private rights, festivals, schools, abortion.....you name it!

Is it EVER that simple? That complex issues about our common life and future can be summed-up in a blip? A quick sound-byte? A one-word "position?" I don't know about you, but my thoughts and perspectives on nothing in life can be summed-up in one word or phrase! Why do we think our candidates and issues can be? It's artificial. And, I would add, detrimental.

There is always, "another side to that story." More to the issue. More complex aspects and angles than what appears on the surface, at first glance, in a chart! If we've learned nothing else about sharing "facts" around the internet, than that, we're at least making a little progress. How often do things get shared, passed on, repeated as true, that are a little, or a *lot* skewed? I think that started in the Garden of Eden!

Why'd you eat the apple, Adam?
"Well, SHE said, (you know, that woman *you* gave me) that it would make me wise!"
"Did she tell you it was defying God's instructions to eat it?"
"Oh. I think I missed that part, Lord!" (Was that on the test?!)

We also are shortsighted when we pigeon-hole one another and

candidates and parties based on ONE narrow view of *one* issue. Or condemn or label people for one, narrow slice of a complex problem.

If we find ourselves voting for a candidate because of their (supposed) stance on ONE issue, we need to stop, get out of the tree, and broaden our lenses. That's been coming out a lot just this week.

VI. SHORTSIGHTED, WE

So, what's the **good** news? In this story? In our lives as they interact with this scripture? Jesus is Long-sighted! Farsighted. Foresighted. Whatever awkward English word you want to use. (For we don't have a very good **antonym** for "shortsighted.")

Jesus, for starters, knew Zacchaeus by name. He wasn't just "that hated, filthy rich tax collector." He was a person. Real. With a soul. Zach was outside the circle in almost every way, but Jesus drew him in, welcomed him to his own table. Fellowshiped with him—in spite of much protest and criticism. "For he, too, is a Son of Abraham!" One of us. Child of God.

Jesus doesn't ask Zach to give up his career, start paying back everyone he swindled. Doesn't make the dinner "invitation" conditional. "If you clean up the books, Buddy, we can meet for coffee and donuts!"

Nope. There's nothing about repentance here. Zach is the one who offers *that* information. "Oh, by the way, I do give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold." Just thought you might wanna know that, Jesus.

What if Jesus came to *our* house today?! Hey YOU!! I don't care *who* you are thought to be or what you've done. I'm

coming to your house and we're sitting down and having supper.
TODAY!

VII. PEOPLE and OWLS IN THE TREES

Last night we were awakened by something in the tree outside our window. An owl was calling, "who....who.....who.....who?!" And, far off in the distance, if you listened very closely, another owl answered. I imagine this was a reply, "Who, ME?!"

Hey YOU!!! What would Jesus say to us, on his way to our house, finding us up there gawking from that tree? Hiding behind the leaves just a bit—hoping not to be noticed, as we observe the crowd on the street from a distance?

How do we respond when Jesus calls us by name and says, "Hey YOU! Yes, you! There's more to this story than meets the eye! More to YOUR story. To your lenses, to your vision for yourself and your life.

I'm coming to your house—today—right now! Let's talk. Let's look at the world and the folks around us—and YOU! with big-hearted eyes and ears. Not through soundbytes and headlines and tweets. Not peering narrowly out through those leaves and between those stiff branches, but through my Father's Eyes. For you were lost, but now you're found. You were blind, shortsighted, but now you see!

Come on down! Let's party! This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it! Amen.