

“The *Short* Sermon”

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Psalm 103:15-18

Luke 19:1-10

I want to dedicate this sermon to the short people out there: particularly Zacchaeus, who scripture says was “small in stature,” and our newly baptized Raj Tiger, who is likely the shortest worshipper in our congregation. In their honor, I have purposely made this sermon short. I know that when the sacraments of communion and baptism take center stage, some attention spans may be a little short. Not only that; some of you had a late night partying with the ecclesiastical set. You are usually good sports for my longer sermons, but I can understand that you are saving the best of your focus to bring to God in the sacraments rather than the sermon.

It also seems that only a very *short* interaction between Zacchaeus and Jesus turned his life around. *No pressure*, preacher! But I do know that if you are able to share some good news in just a few words, it is news worth sharing. I was getting my hair done last week. Mia, who has been coloring my hair for 2 years now, is not only good at what she does; she also gives me just enough friendly chatter and then lets me zone out and even fall asleep in the chair if I like while she works her magic. Since talking to people makes up a good part of my vocation, when I am not “on duty,” I appreciate my quiet time. Mia has never asked me that much about what I do. But last week, she told me she is craving something spiritual. She mentioned a popular Christian self-help writer. Then she asked me, “I guess you know something about spiritual searching, don’t you?” All of the sudden I was alert. What would I say in my 2 minute speech about faith to Mia?

But I realized that just as important as what I say is that I could see the person asking the question, and that she feel seen. What was the deep longing that put her on that spiritual search? How she responds to what I told her about faith will really depend on whether she feels seen or not.

Now there was probably already something in Jesus’ message that drew Zacchaeus to him and sent him running up the sycamore tree for a better view. But what really made the message sink in was that Jesus saw him, noticed him, and picked him out from the crowd. It literally changed his life. Being welcomed and loved like that made him want

to be a better person. That day, he committed to selling everything, paying back each person he had cheated 4 times over, and giving the rest to the poor.

Now, notice that before Zacchaeus was seen by Jesus, the crowds were getting in his way. They even grumbled that Jesus chose to talk to *him* and eat with *him* since Zacchaeus was a *sinner*. Isn't ironic that the crowds, *made up of people following Jesus*, were getting in the way of someone who very much needed to hear, and see, and be seen by Jesus?! Let that sink in a little-- I won't answer the question for you, but it is a question the church should be asking ourselves: are we sometimes getting in the way of people who truly need Jesus? Are we forming a crowd so tight that outsiders cannot see or find a way in?

You see, life is too short to be narrowly judging who is in and who is out. When I die, I would rather be judged for being too reckless in my welcome and love than too narrow. Psalm 103 tells us that our "days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more." Pretty soon we will be lighting candles in love and memory of people who have died. Some may have died far too early, too young. Others may have led grand, full lives. But now, in death, time does not matter. Success or failure does not matter. Sure, these things matter in the eyes of those who remember them. But one day we too will fade like grass, as will those who remember us.

In the scope of everything in the vastness of the universe and in the greatness of who God is, we are not that big. We are not that powerful. So, better make it count for something.

What is a worthwhile measure of the impact of our short lives? If you are a fan of the Broadway show *Rent*, the best measure of the estimated Five hundred twenty five thousand six hundred minutes of a year, and all the years of our lives, is how we loved, and who we loved. The Psalm implies our days are short, like a flower's beauty until the wind sweeps it away. Yet the Psalm also tells us that God's love is from everlasting to everlasting. There is just no end to it, even in our death.

In the church we say that death completes our baptism. When we baptize someone in the church, the Spirit's announcement at Jesus' baptism echoes again: "You are my child, my beloved. In you I am well-pleased."

If we try to keep our eyes open to that belovedness in each person who shows up at our church, whether they are a sinner or a saint, whether they come hungry or come ready

to feed others, we will call forth something holy that God has set within each soul. It is already there but upon arrival that sacredness may be dusty or caught in a tangled mess of competing callings. In our loving welcome of others, we may learn something more about our own belovedness, and of God's welcome of us as well.

Not only that; when Jesus truly sees us, he loves us for who we are, and that love calls us to who we may yet become but have not yet been able to be. Today's gospel is good news for those of us who feel like *not yet* people-- those of us who suspect we have not yet arrived spiritually, or have a deep longing that has not yet been filled, or have a sense that they have not yet truly lived.. The invitation is there .Jesus has already set the table for us, as a model of what to do. So how quickly do you think *you* can scramble down that tree and find something tasty to serve for dinner?