

Church at home

East Leake Methodist Church - 5 July 2020

Sit comfortably in a quiet place and prepare, start with a brief period of silence, turning your mind and spirit towards God.

It is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord
and to sing praises to your name, O Most High;
To tell of your love early in the morning
and of your faithfulness in the night-time Psalm 92

**Hymn StF 136 Morning has broken
Like the first morning**

Prayer of Adoration

We thank you, God!
We want to tell the world what you have done:
your wonderful works.

We praise you, God!
We remember our beginnings
and celebrate belonging together in your world.

We trust you, God!
You are still our help.
We go forward in faith remembering all you have done.

Amen

Prayer of Confession

For closed minds and prejudice,
our unwillingness to change and failure to love,
Father forgive us.

For thinking we know best;
for our unwillingness to listen and learn
from people who come from other parts of the world,
Father forgive us.

For our neglect of you;
for slackness in prayer; for not reading your word,
Father forgive us.

For our failure to witness for you,
for trying to keep Jesus to ourselves and our friends in our local Church;
for our lack of concern for the World Church,
Father forgive us.

Forgive us for the sake of your dear Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord, and wash us clean.

Pause

Thank you that your Son Jesus came to seek and to save the lost.
It is upon your love and forgiveness that we rely.

Amen

Let us join in the Lord's prayer. Our Father

Readings

Psalm 24 or StF 806 for a responsive version

Luke 19. 1-10

Address

Jericho is a city with a very long history. It is one of the oldest cities in the world. During its history it has been destroyed and rebuilt many times. It lies below sea level and is in the valley where the river Jordan runs into the Dead Sea.

The area is virtually desert, but Jericho has always survived disasters and been rebuilt because there are freshwater springs which produce thousands of gallons of water a day, allowing people to live and farm.

Today it is a Palestinian city with 15,000 inhabitants. In 1948 it was declared to be part of the Kingdom of Jordan. It was occupied by the Israelis after the Six Day War in 1967. Then limited Palestinian self rule of Jericho was agreed by Israel in 1994, whilst the surrounding area remains under full Israeli military control.

So, Jericho is as troubled today as it was under Roman rule. If we read "Jews" instead of "Palestinians" and "Romans" instead of "Israelis" we get a good idea of the tensions that were in the city as Jesus and his disciples walked through it on the way to Jerusalem.

Zacchaeus was a Jew who collected the taxes that paid for the Roman occupation. He was resented as a tax collector and despised as a collaborator.

What made his situation even worse was that the Roman system of collecting taxes invited corruption. Wealthy people called "tax farmers" would bid for the right to collect the taxes due to the Romans for an area. The tax farmers would pay a lump sum to the Romans. The Romans then left the tax farmers to get on with collecting the taxes without any further supervision of their activities. The tax farmers were left to get back from the local population the money that they had paid out, plus a "commission" to cover their "expenses".

But there was one big advantage to being a tax collector – you did become rich.

All this explains why Zacchaeus was shut out by the crowd when he tried to see Jesus. He was reduced to the somewhat ridiculous expedient of running out of the town and climbing into a tree. Chief tax collectors do not run in public and they do not climb trees. He must have been desperate to see Jesus.

Why was he so desperate to see Jesus? Why did he go to such lengths?

As you can see from the photograph the sycomore fig tree has wide spreading branches and that would have helped him climb into it. The trees still grow in Israel and are valued for their fruit of figs. The tree that Zacchaeus climbed must have stood by the road leading out of Jericho.



When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up into the tree and said to him "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." Jesus knew that Zacchaeus was there, and Jesus knew that Zacchaeus did not just want to see Jesus, he wanted to talk to him.

Jesus' words are commands. "Come down immediately". "I must stay today." He tells this frightened and embarrassed man, as he perches in the tree, that he, Jesus, wants to talk to Zacchaeus just as much as Zacchaeus wants to talk to him.

Also, Jesus tells Zacchaeus that he, Jesus, is prepared to come to his house and to accept his hospitality. What a command to give to someone who was normally shunned by most of his community! No wonder Zacchaeus came down from the tree "at once" and "welcomed him gladly" into his house.

But not everyone was pleased. We are told that the people around Jesus began to mutter and to criticise. They did not think that Jesus should be a guest of someone like Zacchaeus.

Now we learn why Zacchaeus was so desperate to see Jesus. He stands and promises Jesus that he will immediately give half of his possessions to the poor and that if he has cheated anybody out of anything, he will pay back four times the amount. These are the actions of someone who has come to realise that his way of doing business

has been very wrong. He is implicitly asking Jesus, this great religious teacher, to forgive his sins. He is asking for Jesus' approval and for Jesus' acceptance.

And he receives that forgiveness, approval and acceptance. Jesus says publicly before everyone else present:

"Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham". By calling Zacchaeus "a son of Abraham" Jesus is saying that he is someone truly entitled to claim the promises of salvation that God made to Abraham and to the descendants of Abraham.

And Jesus adds

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost".

This reminds us of the closing verse of the parable of the prodigal son, that we studied two weeks ago, Luke 15.32. There the father in the parable says

"We had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

To seek and to save the lost was, and is, at the heart of Jesus' purpose in coming to earth and living among us.

I guess that Zacchaeus had been feeling uneasy about his way of life for some time. Perhaps he had tried ignoring that unease by concentrating on his business and making more money, or by being indulgent to his family, or by buying things like rich food and drink. The arrival of this famous teacher had made him recognise that there was an emptiness inside him, and that Jesus could put that right. Once Zacchaeus had gone that far, he became desperate to contact his saviour now and without delay. So, he ended up running and climbing into the sycamore fig tree ...

We do not have to do that to find Jesus. He is with us, here and now. Let us pray to him now.

A Reflective Prayer:

Dear Lord, you came to seek and to save the lost. I know you as my saviour and my friend. Help me to follow you more closely, day by day.

If there is something that you want me to give up, or to give away, as Zacchaeus did, please bring it to my mind.

If there is something that you want me to do, please bring it to my mind.

Pause

Thank you for your merciful and loving care to me, day by day.

We ask these our prayers in the Name of Jesus, the Saviour of the World. **Amen**

**Hymn StF 499 Great God, your love has called us here
As we, by love for love were made**

Prayers of Intercession

There is a response to this prayer

Lord of all,

Response In your name we pray

Dear Lord,

fill your church with love and understanding,
so that she may show forth your gospel love.
Lord of all,

In your name we pray,

Fill your people with respect for each other,
a willingness to listen and a generosity to share.
Lord of all,

In your name we pray,

Enable us to listen to and help
all who suffer through injustice, disability or neglect.
Lord of all,

In your name we pray,

May those who make decisions for us be so guided by you,
that they use their power wisely for the good of all.
Lord of all,

In your name we pray,

May those who suffer in pain, loneliness or grief
know the power of your healing love.
Lord of all,

In your name we pray,

May we,
in all we do and say,
and in all we are and strive to be,
be filled with your loving power.
Lord of all,

In your name we pray, Amen

**Hymn: StF 443 Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,
Tender and true.**

Closing Prayers

Lord of heaven and earth,
all creation resounds with your praise.
As we rejoice in your presence
may we know your power to save.
Now and for ever,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

May God bless us
In our sleep with rest, in our dreams with vision,
In our waking with a calm mind,
In our soul with the friendship of the Holy Spirit
Today and every day. **Amen**

This service was prepared by Angela Latham for East Leake Methodist Church