

COLLECT: ALMIGHTY AND MERCIFUL GOD, it is only by your gift that your faithful people offer you true and laudable service: Grant that we may run without stumbling to obtain your heavenly promises, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives with and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, 'now and forever. Amen.

THE LESSONS: First Lesson: Isaiah 1:10-18

Psalm: 32:1-8

Second Lesson: 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12

Gospel: Luke 19:1-10

THE SERMON: In today's collect are the words: Grant that we may run without stumbling to obtain your heavenly promises. This is an appropriate opening for today's sermon whose theme is forgiveness.

In the Gospel, Jesus is passing through Jericho on his way to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem. He will meet a man, Zacchaeus, who is a tax collector. Zaccheus is the chief tax and has grown quite rich.

Now tax collectors were despised by the Jews, who saw them as the dregs of society. They were looked on as traitors because they collected taxes for the Roman captors. They took money away from the Jews and gave it to the Gentile oppressors. They had a certain amount of taxes they were to collect but, they could also collect more and this led to many of them becoming rich and being regarded as thieves.

They were unwelcome in the temple and synagogues. They could not hold offices in the community and could not testify in Jewish court. Devout Jews would avoid all social contact with them.

Two weeks ago, in Luke's Gospel Jesus told his disciples the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector who had gone to the temple to pray. The Pharisee stood alone down front in the temple, so he could be seen, and he prayed: Thank you God that I am not like other people and he points out the tax collector with this phrase: especially that tax collector.

Now there was a tax collector who had come to the temple to pray. Unlike the Pharisee, he stood in the back of the temple, in the shadows, not wanting to be noticed. As he prayed, he did not look up to heaven, He kept his gaze on the floor, he beat his chest and said: "God have mercy on me, I am a sinner".

The scripture doesn't tell us what was weighing so heavenly on the tax collectors mind. We are presented with the fact that he wanted to be in a place where there was God's presence and ask for his forgiveness.

Though shunned by society and banned from places of worship, tax collectors still could have faith.

In today's Gospel, the tax collector, Zacchaeus, hears that Jesus is in Jericho. He has heard about this rabbi and he wants to see who he is. Now he is coming down his street so, Zacchaeus drops what he is doing and hurries out into the street so he can see Jesus.

There is a problem though, Zacchaeus is too short to see over the heads of the people in the crowd so, he can't see Jesus. Over coming this obstacle,

he thinks quickly and climbs a sycamore tree that is there alongside the road. Now he can see Jesus and Jesus can also see him.

Jesus looks up and tells him to come down from the tree because he will be staying at his house. This angers the crowd because this sinner, this tax collector has been asked by Jesus to share his hospitality

Once he has come down from the tree, Zachaeus stands in front of Jesus. Zacchaeus knows his life will change. He testifies to Jesus that half of his possessions he will give to the poor and if he has taken more money from anyone than he should have, he will repay them four times that amount.

Jesus didn't ask Zacchaeus to confess or explain anything about his life. Zacchaeus was so filled with joy that instead of shunning and despising him, Jesus showed compassion and forgiveness. There in front of the disapproving crowd, Jesus said to Zacchaeus, "Today salvation has come to this house. You are a son of Abraham." The message to Zacchaeus and the crowd is that he is forgiven.

If you heard that Jesus was coming to Las Vegas and he is presently on your street, would you drop everything and rush out to meet him? Are there any obstacles in your life that would hinder your meeting him?

As he stood in front of Jesus, Zacchaeus did an immediate assessment of his life and decided there were some things he needed to change. If you were to meet Jesus today, would you do a personal assessment and would there be things you would want to change?

The prophet Isaiah said that if our lives are to be acceptable to God, we should make ourselves clean. How do we do this? Cease doing evil or even thinking it. Learn to do good. Seek justice, be fair and honest. Rescue the

oppressed, help those who are troubled. Defend the orphan and plead for the widow here I think we should provide support whether emotional or physical.

Almost 30 years ago, I remember Bishop Stuart Zabriske calling me on the phone telling me that St Matthew's, after a period of discernment and prayer wanted me to be one of its deacons. I would join James Doloway and Carolyn Shannon who would also be deacons here.

The news surprised me and I too, like Zacchaeus, did a quick personal assessment. I said to Bishop Zabriskie, "I don't know if I can be that good."

Now I had an idea of how ordained persons should behave and I didn't think, at that time, I could fit that mold. There were some things I knew I should stop doing and some relationships I would have to end.

To his credit, Bishop Zabriskie didn't ask me why I didn't know if I could be that good, He simply said St. Matthew's thinks you can and they have called you.

As you can see, I made the changes and I continually ask for God's forgiveness. Amen.

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