

*Christ Church New
Southgate & Friern Barnet*

30 October 2022

[Call to worship](#)

Every day we meet with God,
but Sunday is a special day and this is a
special place.
So, we gather for our special meeting with
God in Jesus,
in excited expectation that our lives will be
enriched,
and that we will journey into the week ahead
as changed and ever-changing people.

Song: How great is our God
All-forgiving, all-loving God,
we worship you today.
We acknowledge your greatness,
confessing we cannot understand your ways
—
but we know that they are wonderful.
We bring you all our praise,
joining our voices with your children around
the world,
lifting our hearts and faces to you.
You, God of our lives, our hearts, our world,
we bless your name today.
Amen.

Song Every Praise is to our God

All age activity – who are you meeting this
week?

Today we will explore a special meeting with
Jesus and how it changed someone's life;
and think about how Jesus might change our
lives too.

Gracious Lord, who sees all,
you know all that we hide in our hearts.
We lay before you all the things

that dishonour you and us,
acknowledging the damage they cause.
We turn from hate and greed and pride.
We ask that you would restore us and renew
us,
transforming our lives by the words and
actions of your Son, Jesus,
and cleansing us with your Holy Spirit,
through whom you make your home in us.
Amen.

The God who called us, calls us still:
cleansing our hearts and renewing our
minds.
We delight in knowing that we are forgiven,
that we can turn away from wrongdoing,
that we can start afresh today.
In God's great love, we choose to live
differently.
For Jesus' sake,
Amen

Reading: Luke 19 1-10

Jesus and Zacchaeus
19 Jesus entered Jericho and made his way
through the town. 2 There was a man there
named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax
collector in the region, and he had become
very rich. 3 He tried to get a look at Jesus,
but he was too short to see over the crowd.
4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-
fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going
to pass that way.

5 When Jesus came by, he looked up at
Zacchaeus and called him by name.
“Zacchaeus!” he said. “Quick, come down! I
must be a guest in your home today.”

6 Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took
Jesus to his house in great excitement and
joy. 7 But the people were displeased. “He
has gone to be the guest of a notorious
sinner,” they grumbled.

8 Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the
Lord and said, “I will give half my wealth to

the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!”

9 Jesus responded, “Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man[a] came to seek and save those who are lost.”

Song – when I was lost

Zacchaeus name means ‘righteous’ He was short in stature. People recognized him by his size. Maybe you know some people who are identified by some physical characteristic. You make judgments about people because they are tall, pretty, have red or blonde hair, bald, ugly, fat, rich, or poor. The sad reality in our western culture is that we often assign value to a person based on physical appearance.

But Jesus called Zacchaeus by name! Jesus illustrated how we should relate to people and how God relates to us. God knows our name. The Bible says in Numbers 6:25 that God desires His face to shine upon you. A shining face is beautiful description of someone who is happy to see you.

Do you remember a time when your children were young – that they are always looking for your approval, and the excitement when they see you in a crowd – at a school concert or similar. That shining face.

On the surface This seems like a cute story, about a short man who wanted to see Jesus, nothing really earth-shattering, which is strange considering that it comes at an incredibly pivotal moment in Jesus’ life. This is the very last event before his entry into Jerusalem and the suffering and crucifixion which follow; it is the last moment of Jesus’

semi-normal life of teaching and healing before meeting his destiny. In fact, because of this story’s important placement in Luke’s Gospel, many Orthodox churches read this passage every year on the last Sunday before Lent. So why would Luke give this little story pride of place in the arc of Jesus’ life?

Zacchaeus was a rich man and a Jew, he got rich legal yet unsavoury methods. In the Roman Empire, areas were divided up and auctioned off to tax collectors like Zacchaeus, who paid Rome a fee for the right to collect taxes in his city, Jericho. He then had to shake people down for their taxes to make sure he got his money back—plus quite a bit extra as profit. It was totally unregulated—whatever tax collectors could grab, they kept. And those in power didn’t care how fairly the people at the bottom were treated as long as there was no unrest or uprising. Zacchaeus looked at this unjust system and said, “Okay, I’ll play along. I’m not gonna worry about what I’m taking from others, that’s their problem.” Some would say that makes him a successful businessman. That makes him smart.

However, that’s not how his neighbours saw him. They called him a “sinner,” which is how all tax collectors were thought of. They collaborated with Rome against their fellow citizens, and so they were shunned and rejected. This system works well for Zacchaeus until he looks around and realizes he doesn’t have any friends. And he knows the reason for this, no one has to spell it out. He knows that he has sold out his community for the sake of money, that his love of wealth has completely isolated him.

But he hears stories about a traveling rabbi, how just before entering Jericho, he gave a blind man back his sight. How right before that, he told a rich young man to give away everything that he owned, that that was the one thing he was lacking. Zacchaeus puts those things together and wonders if maybe

he, also a rich man, can receive the one thing he's lacking and be healed. Zacchaeus is looking for an intervention. So he rushes ahead to climb a tree and get a look at someone who is the opposite of him. Someone who, rather than turning his back on his people and profiting off them, has devoted himself to teaching and healing them. Someone who, rather than pursuing wealth and a nice home with lots of possessions has chosen a life of poverty. But someone who, instead of being lonely and reviled, has a crowd of friends following him. Zacchaeus makes a choice. The moment of Zacchaeus' salvation doesn't come when Jesus pronounces it, nor does it come when he says he'll give half his possessions away. The moment comes when Zacchaeus runs towards that sycamore tree.

When Jesus talks about salvation coming to Zacchaeus' house, that's not about getting into heaven. This is earthbound salvation that Zacchaeus experiences right away. It's not so much that he's been forgiven his sin as much as been freed from it—freed from his addiction to wealth and restored to his community. And just like that, he has a new life--like a blind man suddenly able to see again.

But there's another way to read this story in which Zacchaeus isn't a sinner who converts but a saint who surprises. He doesn't make promises about the future, rather, he defends himself and shocks the crowd by appealing to his past.

In this reading, Zacchaeus is a hidden saint about whom people have made all sorts of false assumptions about his corruption. And so he defends himself: "Lord, I always give half of my wealth to the poor, and whenever I discover any fraud or discrepancy I always make a fourfold restitution."

The crowd had demonized Zacchaeus. Jesus praises him as "a son of Abraham."

I like the second way of thinking, It fits with the many times that Jesus calls out good people who are bad and commends bad people who are good.

Luke has already mentioned several unlikely heroes — the faith of a Roman soldier, a "good" Samaritan, a shrewd manager who was commended for his dishonesty, a Samaritan leper who was the only person to give thanks for his healing, and a tax collector (!) who was commended as more righteous than a sanctimonious Pharisee. The Episcopal priest Elizabeth Kaeton notes the several ironies here. The despicable Zacchaeus is the generous one. The traditional interpretation that Zacchaeus is a sinner who's converted "tricks us into committing the very sin that the story condemns. It presents Zacchaeus not as a righteous and generous man who is wrongly scorned by his prejudiced neighbors, but as the story of a penitent sinner."

"Turns out," says Kaeton, that "Zacchaeus does live up to his name. He is, in fact, 'the righteous one.' Turns out, Jesus knew that all along!"

Kaeton thus concludes with a nod to Halloween: "Jesus is once again turning our world upside down, confronting us with our assumptions about who is good and who is evil and demonstrating for us the tricks we play in our minds before we treat one another — one way or another. Like the crowd murmuring about Zacchaeus, it is easy to be blinded by our prejudice of 'those people' and find ourselves accusing the very person or people we should be emulating."

Zacchaeus' sin was not violence or betrayal, or any other personal wrong, it was economic injustice to his community. We haven't all defrauded others as Zacchaeus did. But many of us do benefit from an unjust system, where, for example, food is

brought to us by people who often can't afford themselves to buy what they're serving. Where our socks and t-shirts and Christmas toys are shipped to us from China and Bangladesh, made by people who get nothing close to minimum wage and don't even have safe work conditions, just so we get to pay £5 for a t-shirt and feel great that we scored such a bargain.

The way an unjust economic system thrives is not the people at the top manipulating high finance. It depends on the people at the bottom grabbing what they can from those around them, because if they're doing just a little bit better than the next guy, they keep their mouths shut and don't worry about what the people at the top are doing. This is how all corrupt economic systems work. It's how drug dealers work. It's how the executives in major businesses and world banks work. And it's how Zacchaeus worked until he got woke.

Like Zacchaeus, we don't need someone to tell us right from wrong—we know what's right. We don't need someone to tell us that making exorbitant profits off the backs of your brothers and sisters is wrong. We don't need someone to tell us we're living in an unjust system, we know it, and some of us know we're benefitting from it and our addiction to those benefits. You don't need to wait for Jesus to walk down your street to run and claim your healing and freedom from that unjust system. Be healed of the compulsion to get everything you can for yourself. Let salvation come to your house. Not the kind you have to wait till you get to heaven for, but the kind that frees you in this life to walk beside your brothers and sisters as equals and in freedom, like Zacchaeus, a sinner no more.

Poem | [Philip Chircop](#)

What if you were a good man after all?
a gentleman misjudged,

a generous person envied,
an authentic man wrongly accused?
What if it wasn't fear of the crowd
but only your short stature
and your bottomless curiosity
that pushed you up the sycamore tree?
And what if the Master, passing through,
intuiting the sincere beauty that you were,
looked up - longing to meld his loving gaze
to yours -
and spoke out your radical goodness
with prophetic courage?
Now I can see the Master
ripping through thick layers
of biased fear, unfounded,
looking beyond the crowd's ugly thoughts
and words of suspicion,
looking beyond the grumbling and gossip,
looking beyond labels and stereotypes.
Now I can hear the Master
speaking in eloquent silence
syllables that resurrect:
"Zacchaeus, I know you are really not what
they say you are.
You're all right in my book. Hurry. Come
down. I will dine with you, today."
Pulled back down to earth
from between and betwixt twisted branches
and leafs
the mid-air adventure
morphs into a simple banquet
of broken bread, overflowing wine.
and shared conversation.
A taste of eucharist!
And hopefully
a transformed people
no longer a crowd but a community
blessed with a fresh consciousness
and a new vision
big enough to see that perhaps
this is the story
not of a repentant sinner
but of a hidden saint,
now exposed.

I was struck this week by an interview by
Louis Theroux with Michael Ebenezer
Kwadjo Omari Owuo Jr - or more well

known as Stormzy I think it gives us something to think about...

Louis asked, How important is it for you to be here (church)

We Grew up in church, I have had faith all my life, and I have loved God all my life – but I feel that you’ve got to come to your own realisation, innit, as much as you (mum) raised me in church, Ive got to know God for myself innit, and I think during the pandemic, there was a grown man realisation, there was an adult realisation, Oh wow this is what it means to pray, this is what this scripture means, literally I was in my house, by myself with my dogs, out of my relationship, I wasn’t touring, I wasn’t even recording at the time, I was just sat down, I was still, and even the bible talks about stillness, I was still, this is where Im meant to be around people who don’t care about whatever it is that the world thinks I am, the man who I wanna be is this man. Implication is the man of faith. Building his home on Family and love and God.

Song – there is a love that seeks us

Intercession prayer

Lord, the world is in turmoil.

Our nation is in turmoil.

Your created ones are in turmoil.

Come, Lord Jesus,
surround us with songs of deliverance
and bring about change.

We pray for an end to the war in Ukraine.

We pray for Somalia where people are enduring drought and facing famine. We pray for the people of Iran and the injustices that the people are enduring. These are just a few countries in the world but many more are in need of your hand.

Come, Lord Jesus,
surround us with songs of deliverance
and bring about change.

Our nation, Lord, is in need of your stability and unifying hand as the third Prime Minister in a year takes up residence in

Downing Street. Bring order into the chaos. We pray for an upturn in our economy as more and more workers strike and threaten to strike, due to the biggest squeeze on incomes since the 1950’s.

Come, Lord Jesus,
surround us with songs of deliverance
and bring about change.

Lord, there are many people today lining their pockets at other people’s expense. We pray for all victims of scammers, cheats and fraudsters. We pray for all enduring dark times; for all who can see no way out. May the leaders of your church encourage and build in your name, offering hope where there is none. May your church shine a light on our communities and reach out to all, including those whom society views as unpopular.

Come, Lord Jesus,
surround us with songs of deliverance
and bring about change.

Lord, when you called to Zacchaeus, he gladly welcomed you to his home. His meeting with you brought about inward and outward change. We pray for change to be wrought in your world, in our nation, in us your created ones.

Come, Lord Jesus,
surround us with songs of deliverance
and bring about change.

Amen.

Song - We seek your kingdom

Thank you, Jesus,
for being with us today and every day.
In our noisy, busy lives,
we pray that we may hear you calling our names
and make the effort to see your face in the crowd.

Amen.