

“Get Down From There!”

Luke 19:1-10

Covenant Presbyterian Church

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For those of you keeping a close eye on scripture readings from week to week you may notice something amiss here. Today I am going to read Luke 19: 1-10, and next week it says we are also going to read Luke 19:1-10. Jeff, you may be saying to yourself, surely that can't be true. The same scripture two weeks in a row? Madness! To that I respond; no! This week we are going to hear the story of Jesus encountering Zacchaeus, and I have the opportunity to preach a sermon about it. Next week we will have the distinct pleasure of enjoying the fruits of Vacation Bible School as they present the musical 'Hurry On Down', which tells the story in a fun and different way. So listen to the story of Zacchaeus from Luke 19:1-10

1 He entered Jericho and was passing through it.

2 A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich.

3 He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature.

4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way.

5 When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today."

6 So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him.

7 All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner."

8 Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much."

9 Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham.

10 For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

For many people, the story of Zacchaeus is a very familiar one. It's an extremely memorable story. It even has its own song

"Zacchaeus was a wee little man,
And a wee little man was he.
He climbed up in a sycamore tree
For the Lord he wanted to see."

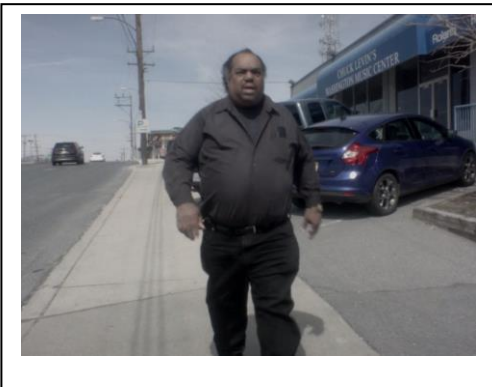
There are really great elements in the story. There's humor and surprise and reversals. It is one of those stories that is described in specific and amusing detail. It starts with a description of Zacchaeus, a tax collector, and a rich one at that. One of those people. One of those who defrauded his people in order to get himself ahead. Based on this setup, we can easily expect that Zacchaeus is due for a pretty hard fall. Luke does not have nice things to say about rich people. Not only was he of weak character, but he was short of stature, a small man in a number of ways. So we have a mental image of this guy. And then this little man wants to see Jesus as he's coming through Jericho and he runs ahead and climbs up a tree. I want you all to close your eyes and imagine someone you don't much like. Picture them as four feet tall wearing opulent robes and climbing a tree. It's a silly image. That's the image that Luke is conjuring here. But beware to anyone

who gets comfortable while reading the gospels, because they tend to upend expectations. Maybe you're expecting a limb to break under Zacchaeus or for his robe to get snagged on a branch. Nope. That's not what happened. Jesus looks up and sees this small man up in a tree and calls to him by name. Jesus, for whom Zacchaeus debased himself in order to get a good view, called out to him and invited himself over for a meal. This invitation changes Zacchaeus, who stands up and declares himself transformed and repentant. The story of a sinner who changed his ways, a story of repentance.

In looking at it though, maybe this is less of a conversion story, and more of a miracle story. Think about the way that this story is laid out. Look at the parallels between our first reading – it starts with a crowd of people, and in both stories, there is a need for both the blind man and Zacchaeus to differentiate themselves from the crowd. In both stories, there is a refusal from the people around Jesus to respect the person in need. Jesus calls out to both the blind man and to Zacchaeus, and they both rejoiced at receiving Christ. Just because Zacchaeus was not healed from a physical ailment does not mean that what Jesus did was no less miraculous. Jesus healed the sickness in Zacchaeus' heart. Zacchaeus was a man who made a living by betraying his people. Tax collectors purchased the right to collect taxes from their people and then turn a profit on whatever above and beyond they collect. To be a tax collector was to take from your neighbors as much as you were able to extort, and Zacchaeus, a wealthy tax collector, was able to extort quite a bit. For him to suddenly stand up and say he was going to give away half of his possessions and four times what he had defrauded was a complete shift in his orientation to the world. It was a miraculous transformation of someone from sinner to gracious giver. This is no mere conversion, but something far beyond. Miracle stories often serve an illustrative purpose. Jesus heals on the Sabbath to show that helping others is more important than obeying

the letter of the law, Jesus healed the blind man to show that the outcast and downtrodden are not beneath his notice. Jesus heals Zacchaeus in order to show that he would not only dine with sinners, but would actively seek them out. When we read this story, we need to understand that the main character of the story is not Zacchaeus, but rather Jesus. That is not to say that Zacchaeus life and example are not important – we should all strive to ensure that we are treating our neighbor with fairness, we should always bear in mind the human tendency towards greed and selfishness. Zacchaeus transformation was not a normal occurrence, but that does not mean that it is out of reach from us.

Meet Daryl Davis.



Daryl is a musician who played with legends like Jerry Lee Lewis and Chuck Berry as well as an actor appearing on stage as well as in some episodes of the tv show, The Wire. Born in Chicago, but raised around the world with his

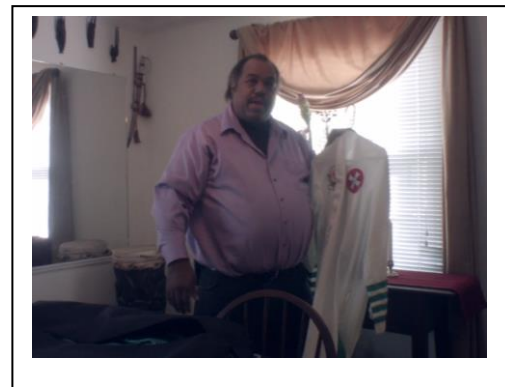
diplomat parents, Daryl has lived an extraordinary life. However, one of the most fascinating things about Daryl is not his musical career, but rather his hobbies.

Daryl Davis has a very fascinating collection. Here he is pictured with a robe from a grand dragon of the Ku Klux Klan. This is one



of the 25 KKK robes that Daryl has.

However, the robes



and pins and flags representing the KKK and

neo-nazis are not what Daryl Davis collects. Daryl Davis collects friends. Daryl has made it his life's mission to sit down and make friends with members of hate groups. All of the flags, pins and robes that he has have come from former



members of those groups. People who have renounced their hateful beliefs and have quit the klan and given all their mementos of that time to Daryl. Daryl is the subject of the documentary "Accidental Courtesy: Daryl Davis, Race and America" that is on Netflix right now if you want to go watch it. One example

of Daryl's work can be found early in the film. Daryl was once on an episode of the daytime talk show Geraldo appearing alongside a couple who were members of the Klan and their children, who were well on their way towards becoming members. Years later, Daryl recalled this family and checked to see how they were doing. He learned that their father was in prison. He looked up the phone number for the family and called the mother, explaining who he was. After she cursed him out for even calling he made an offer to her. He flew to Chicago and drove the family across the state to visit their father in prison, which was something that no one in the klan had ever offered. At a speech alongside Daryl Davis on Martin Luther King day the mother said "well, my little girl came a long way you know, no thanks to her father and I. We really did our best to destroy our kids, and I do believe that God works through people, other human beings, and he most certainly uses Daryl Davis as an instrument because that man has touched a lot of lives." He was even named as the godfather of the child of the grand dragon of the KKK. That grand dragon later quit the KKK, giving his robe and hood as a gift to Daryl. And these small interactions with Klansmen, these friendships, don't just have minor effects on the lives of his new friends, but large consequences for our country. Daryl befriended the grand dragon of the

Maryland KKK, a klansmen and police officer working in Baltimore. Through their friendship Daryl ultimately convinced this man that racism and hatred were poisonous and he renounced his membership in the KKK. In the wake of his conversion the Maryland KKK was left without any leadership and there is currently no active Klan chapter in Maryland. While some may criticize him for moving too slowly and working on too small of a scale, there is no denying that the lives of those touched by Daryl Davis were changed in significant, positive, and life giving ways. Once again, the name of the film is Accidental Courtesy. I recommend you check it out, but should caution that, because the subject matter is rather heavy, there is some fairly difficult language and can be rather hard to watch at times.

In meeting Zacchaeus, Jesus changed the man's heart in an instant. A miraculous change in life orientation. Daryl Davis' interactions with his friends do not change hearts immediately. Sometimes there is no change at all. But he *has* changed hearts and changed the world. Here is the advice that he has "Patience is what it takes. But patience doesn't mean sitting around on your butt waiting for something to happen. Be proactive. And don't just sit around and talk with your friends who believe the way you do. Invite other people who have differences of opinion".

When we create miraculous relationships through finding common ground and forming friendships, we create a fertile ground for the kingdom. We provide the space for real genuine change, starting at an individual level, which then grows and builds to change society. The work that Daryl Davis has done shows that the kingdom is in our reach. Our God exists in community with God's self. The trinity shows that to be in God's image is to be in community with one another. We can point to Daryl Davis as embodying this community of God. As he says at the end of the film "The friends I made I continue to keep. I never set out to convert

anybody. I just set out to get that answer to my question: 'How can you hate me when you don't even know me?' and, in my quest to have that answer, they couldn't answer it. And some of them ended up converting themselves"

Can we say that these transformations are anything but miraculous? No! They are genuine miracles. When Jesus encountered Zaccheus, he spoke to him and he invited himself over to dinner. In that exact moment, Zaccheus heart was transformed and he repented of his ways. Daryl Davis became friends with the grand dragons of the KKK, attended klan rallies as an invited guest. Slowly he broke down the cemented opinions and hatreds that had been in the hearts of the klansmen he knew. Just because it doesn't happen immediately does not make it any less miraculous. If we are chasing after quick and easy fixes to deeply held hatreds and ingrained problems then we will find ourselves constantly frustrated. We can't change hearts in the blink of an eye like Jesus did. However, we can find ourselves acting out Jesus call to sinners and hurting people by working those slow burning miracles. Jesus' power allowed it to happen quickly, but God's Spirit does not work on our timetable. God's Spirit transforms and moves in her own mysterious ways. But make no mistake, friends, we are capable of miracles. Over time and trial and effort; through hard work and prayer and relationship; through the power of the Holy Spirit, living out the call of Jesus Christ, in the sure knowledge that God our father liberates the poor and oppressed we can work miracles that build us up closer and closer to that peaceable, just and merciful kingdom of God.