

Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time (year C)

Luke 19: 1-10

We continue reading in Luke's gospel.

You may recall (at least *vaguely*?) last Sunday's gospel:
the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector.

This week, we have another tax collector, one whom Jesus befriends.

Jesus seems to have a soft spot for tax collectors!

And, in between last week's parable (the beginning of chapter 18)

and this week's passage (the beginning of chapter 19),

in the middle of chapter 18, (which we, of course, did not read)

we have

- the rich official who is unable to follow Jesus for attachment to his riches
- Jesus' declaration: "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter heaven".

Hmm: the supposed incompatibility of the riches of earth with the riches of heaven.

And here Jesus, the heavenly One, is befriending the fellows with the money;

fellows who, no less, are not always honest with the money.

Recall that the tax collectors collected taxes for the *occupants*, i.e. the Romans.

Consequently, they were traitors.

Moreover, they were renowned for dipping into the treasury in order to line their pockets.

Consequently, they were *double* traitors.

Jesus amazingly disregards social propriety.

Jesus reaches beyond social categories.

Jesus befriends the fellow with the money.

Could it be that Jesus has compassion on us in our struggles and temptations?

Could it be that Jesus actually enters into the messiness of our personal world,
to encounter us right where we are?

And so we have an unexpected encounter, interestingly characterized by playfulness.

Jesus is in the valley of the Jordan, on his way to Jerusalem, still about 25 miles away.

He comes to Jericho, intending "to pass through"; and lo, he *stays*.

There is a *big*, loud crowd.

There is a *little* fellow (with *big* hope), Zacchaeus,

who, in child-like fashion, climbs a sycamore tree.

Disregarding

- caution
 - social "propriety"
 - the contempt of the crowd for him
- he climbs a sycamore tree "in order to see Jesus".

He wants to *see* Jesus. How beautiful. How real.

And, interestingly, all he does is look, is gaze.

He does not scream Jesus' name, which one might expect,
so that Jesus take notice of him.

But Jesus does take notice of him.

Hmm: hopeful, expectant hearts attract Jesus...

Zacchaeus looks at Jesus, and Jesus looks at Zacchaeus.

And, in that momentary, silent exchange, eye-to-eye,

Jesus reads Zacchaeus' heart.

Jesus reads "opening".

Hence Jesus' self-invitation.

It is *tremendous*: "Zacchaeus, I am coming to your house to play!"

Whenever Jesus reads "opening" in our hearts, He enters, He comes to play.

Jesus tangibly enters Zacchaeus' world.

In so doing, Jesus, of course, breaks the rules,

for He goes "to stay at the house of a sinner".

Love, however, transcends rules. Love is the *fulfillment* of the law.

When Jesus is in loving mode (which is always!),

He freely breaks whatever rules are a hindrance to loving.

Anything that hinders love, Jesus respectfully disregards.

This encounter is all about love. The signs are

- the urgency: "Come *quickly*, for *today* I *must* stay at your house" and Zacchaeus who descends quickly to welcome Jesus with joy
- the fact that Jesus leaves the crowd for *one* person

Love is characterized by *haste*.

Love is always *personal* (strictly speaking, there is no group love).

The crowd stands in stark contrast to this loving encounter.

What are they doing? *grumbling*

Inner (and outer) complaint expresses *closure* of heart.

They are curious, but not in the same way as Zacchaeus.

Their curiosity is bound by legalism,

and they are not really open to welcoming something, someOne new.

Zacchaeus, on the other hand, *opens* his heart, and does so more and more.

Through the slightest opening of our heart, Jesus floods us with love.

And such love, in turn, opens the heart even more.

Zacchaeus' expectant heart and mind are touched.

In that tree-street exchange a mysterious gift is given.

The gift is the gift of salvation, i.e. the gift of being introduced into relationship with God

Zacchaeus is gifted with the recognition of Jesus as Lord,

Zacchaeus is gifted with the freedom of the children of God,

i.e. freedom from all forms of slavery – in Zacchaeus' case, his money.

But there is also a *cooperation* with the gift of salvation.

It is a gift, but

- we are to cooperate with it,
- we are to manifest our good will, our willingness.

Salvation is experienced in the context of *relationship* with Christ,
and relationship with Christ is precisely never forced.

We must *want* it, and we must cooperate with it.

That is why Jesus does not declare that salvation has visited Zacchaeus' house
until *after* Zacchaeus expresses his intention to share and to recompense.

Generosity can be and ought to be an expression of our willingness to let Jesus enter.

The Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost.

Jesus ("God saves") comes to find us and to set us free

- from whatever hinders us from being in relationship with God
- to love generously

Love has come to town, and he wants to reach us in our brokenness.

Let us eagerly welcome him, as we are,

knowing that our "hang-ups" are not an issue for him.

Let us let him enter, so that He can play in the house of our hearts...