

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost
30-10-2022
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

- Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4 How long will evil prevail?
God encourages us to wait and live by faith
- Psalms 119: 137-144 No matter what distress befalls upon us,
God is righteous and true
- 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12 Paul thanks God for the Thessalonians,
and prays for them.
- Luke 19: 1-10 Jesus brings salvation to Zacchaeus's house

Introduction

The main theme from today's gospel reading is the forgiveness God offers us in Jesus.

I would like to explore this Story of Zacchaeus before us today, and see how it might help us to better understand our need for forgiveness, and the wonderful gift of forgiveness that God offers us in Jesus.

Zacchaeus

Firstly, let us look at Zacchaeus. He is described in today's reading from Luke's Gospel as a Chief Tax Collector.

I'd like to have a show of hands, as to who likes paying tax?

I don't think anyone likes paying taxes. But in today's society we need a good system of taxation so the government can provide services for us to thrive. However, 2000 years ago in Israel, there was a whole other level of angst. The taxes they had to pay, were being levied on the people by the invading Romans, to support the Romans tyranny over the people.

Can you imagine if New Zealand took over Australia, and we ended up having to pay a lot more tax to support New Zealanders?

So, in Jesus' day, being Jewish, and being a tax collector for the Romans was considered being a traitor to your own people. Another issue was that they had the Roman army to support them, so they often overcharged to enrich themselves. It is little wonder that tax collectors in Jesus' day were despised.

So, Zacchaeus gives us a very good example of a human being who has not lived a perfect life. Someone who hasn't done the right thing. The reality though is that we are all like Zacchaeus. We may not have betrayed our fellow citizens like Zacchaeus did, but we have all fallen short in one way or another, in our lives.

I think that most people are trying to live decent lives. If we look at humanity, the bible tells us that we are created in the image of God, so we all have within us the will to do amazing and wonderful things. We can see acts of kindness and love both within and outside of the church every day. But we also see in our human nature great capacity to want things our own way. As we look around God's world, we also see so many problems, such as war and family conflict all too readily.

Without God's forgiveness we are lost and cut off from God. In this story of Zaccheaus today we see human nature on display for us. Zaccheaus needed forgiveness, and we do too.

Zaccheaus' interest in Jesus

Let's now look at how Zaccheaus showed interest in Jesus. We know that Zaccheaus was an unpopular person. But he heard Jesus was in town and he wanted to see what all the fuss was about. But Zaccheaus was short. He probably thought if he got up high, at least he might be able to see Jesus.

Zaccheaus did see Jesus, and Jesus also saw him. Jesus didn't hesitate to reach out to Zaccheaus.

And just like Jesus was there to respond to Zaccheaus, Jesus is always there, wanting us to seek Him out, and assuring us that He will be there for us.

Jesus will respond to us, if we seek Him out. But Jesus doesn't force us. Love doesn't work like that.

Others Respond to Zaccheaus and Jesus

Those who witnessed what was happening between Jesus and Zaccheaus were not happy. Jesus was supposed to be a great teacher of how to live a good life and here he was with a tax collector, a sinner.

It's not a surprising reaction. After all, Zaccheaus was a person who had done bad things to his fellow Jews.

I believe there is a great challenge here for us. How do we treat those who are unpopular? How do we treat those who don't fit in, or don't see the world as we see it?

Jesus went to eat with Zaccheaus. Zaccheaus was a fellow human being and Jesus came for all humanity.

Jesus final words in the story today are:-

'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.'

Zaccheaus responds to Jesus

And let us now explore how Zaccheaus responded to Jesus. Zaccheaus was “happy” to welcome Jesus into his house.

Are we likewise happy to welcome Jesus into our lives?

And on having the presence of Jesus with him, Zaccheaus responded with action.

Zaccheaus committed to support the poor, and he committed to reimburse and generously compensate any he had defrauded.

Zaccheaus didn't say to Jesus, “Oh I'm sure you're too busy to come to my place”, and after Jesus did come, he didn't say, “Thanks for coming, it was nice, but I'll just keep on living in the same way”.

Zaccheaus accepted Jesus and changed his life, as a result of the forgiveness he found in Jesus.

Jesus didn't just call out to Zaccheaus. Jesus came for all Humanity to know the way to God.

How do we respond to Jesus?

The Christian life begins with responding to Jesus, accepting the forgiveness that Jesus offers us, and then seeking to act accordingly, living our lives as followers of Jesus.

Conclusion

We've looked at Zaccheaus specifically this morning, and the other bible readings we have had also talk about persevering in faith.

Zaccheaus sort to meet Jesus in his life, and as he came to understand the wonderful forgiveness that Jesus offered, he then responded to Jesus in a way that transformed his life for the better.

I pray that as we face a new week ahead of us. We might have the faith of Zaccheaus, so that we might be able to climb whatever the sycamore tree's might be in our lives, to clearly see Jesus. And that as we see Jesus, as we place our faith in Jesus, as we experience the wonderful forgiveness that God offers us in Jesus, we might also be moved to action as Zaccheaus was. Amen.