

**Ps 119; Hab 1:1-4, 2:1-4;  
1 Th 1:1-4, 11-12; Lu 19:1-10**

We meet the Old Testament Prophet Habakkuk in his lament to the Lord. He is respectful and humble in his questions: “How long shall I cry for help, and You will not listen? Why do you make me see wrong-doing and look at trouble?” (Hab 1:1-3) The prophet is in anguish because sixth century BC Judah is in chaos. Tiny, helpless Judah is surrounded by powerful armies led by kings who intend to gobble up this tasty slice of Ancient Near Eastern cake. Little Judah is on the crossroads of three major caravan routes – and has at least two great Mediterranean harbors. Just irresistible to the power brokers of the day.

You and I know what comes next: The Babylonian Exile of God’s people. Habakkuk is the prophet who does not rant and rave at his people. He comes to God for answers. Do you go to God for answers? Do you wait patiently for God to speak? Do you share with your friends what God has spoken to you? Just asking.

Habakkuk is dismayed by the corruption and godlessness of his nation. He calls upon God to

change hearts and minds. He is saying, “Lord, why don’t You stop this madness and restore faith and rightness in our land?” Perhaps you ask for similar things. Go read this little gem of a Bible book for yourself. It is a very short – very good read. Dwell in the answers God gives.

Today, we meet up with Jesus in the ancient city of Jericho. One of the oldest cities in the world, by the way. A great crowd has turned out to meet Jesus and to hear Him speak – perhaps some are seeking healing – or asking for a miracle in their lives. So, here is Zacchaeus – jumping up and down – trying to get to the front of the crowd – he really wants to see this rabbi from Nazareth. He finally runs ahead of the crowd and climbs a sycamore tree for a better view.

Zacchaeus is very short, and he is also very rich. The Scripture says he is a “chief tax collector.” This may mean he had a cozy arrangement with the Roman authorities to make an especially large profit from his Palestinian neighbors. So, if the people of Judah hate tax collectors, they would reserve double or triple contempt for Zacchaeus. He’s a big, rich sinner.

From what Jesus preached in Luke's Beatitudes (last week), we would expect Him to walk right by this Zacchaeus character. Jesus has pronounced woe and judgment upon rich people in this life.

When Jesus looks up into the sycamore tree at the little tax collector, He sees him with eyes of – love. Something about Jesus' reputation has caused Zacchaeus to come near. Jesus sees more than a small man in a tree – he sees a heart and soul that hunger and thirst for goodness, righteousness, perhaps ***change*** in his lonely, wretched life. After all, it's great to have plenty of everything – but what about having real friends to share the good things in this world. We need the connection of a caring community. It may be there is a touch of the Prophet Habakkuk in our friend Zacchaeus. Perhaps in us as well. Do you wonder sometimes, "Is everybody around me on the take? Are human compassion and kindness dead? All this bitterness, strife and violence makes my heart ache." Zacchaeus is looking for answers – he already knows the questions.

**Jesus is the answer.** Jesus is the promise of God's love made real. He is the Divine One who takes our part. He begs the Father for our lives – “Forgive them, Father, for they do not know what they're doing.” This He spoke even from the cross on the day of His sacrifice.

Events move quickly once Jesus says, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” (v 5) Zacchaeus is so happy! Divine Love has entered his life – from the famous Rabbi Jesus. We hear growling and murmuring from the crowd, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.” (v 7)

As Zacchaeus shinnies down the tree trunk, he is bursting with the love that is growing inside him, “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.” (v 8) Remember, he is very wealthy. He probably can live well on half his holdings – plus pay back those he has cheated. But the main thing is he is moved to act upon his growing faith. The grumbling of the church leaders doesn't quench his joy. Jesus loves him – how wonderful is that?

The world-wide spread of the Gospel message usually comes to very poor folks discovering the love of God in Christ. There is great joy there because God's love can grow anywhere in any circumstances. We do hear of rich people coming to Jesus – and then making the most of their wealth for His kingdom. But it isn't the usual story.

A couple years ago, the rock singer Bono said, "My understanding of the Scriptures has been made simple by the person of Christ. Christ teaches that God is love. What does that mean? What it means for me: a study of the life of Christ. Love here describes itself as a child born in straw poverty, the most vulnerable situation of all, without honor. I don't let my religious world get too complicated." (*Bono on Jesus, Religion and Grace*, by Jeremy Myers, [redeeminggod.com](http://redeeminggod.com)) Bono has wealth and fame. He also prays with his wife and children. He follows Jesus in humility of soul.

Clement of Alexandria (2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> c AD) preached, "(The Lord Jesus) bids Zacchaeus and Matthew, the rich tax-gathers, entertain Him hospitably. And He does not bid them part with their

property, but, applying the just and removing the unjust judgment, He (adds), 'To-day salvation has come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham.' (Jesus) praises the use of property as...giving a share of it (for)... drink to the thirsty, bread to the hungry, to take the houseless in, and clothe the naked." (*from Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved*)

On World Communion Sunday we take our place in the great family of God's people. Race, culture and possessions are cast aside when describing a Jesus follower. We are the people in whom the love of God is growing. Amen.