

Dear friends,

Here we are again – back on track! Within the story of Zacchaeus, we see that he appreciated that there was a sense of urgency about Jesus' call – and perhaps we need to appreciate that there is a message for us all in this. An urgency in becoming what we are called to be. Mahatma Ghandi said: '*Be the change you long to see*' – could this become our motto. I hope that you are all able to face the coming autumn and winter seasons with hope, knowing that after the dark days comes the Spring. I wish you all the best and every blessing to you all. Margaret.

Call to worship: As disciples of Jesus, we are called now by the Living God to worship him together as we each read this – for we are part of the body of Christ.

Come saints and sinners – come seek and come find.

Come to be satisfied with the good things that earthy can neither produce nor buy – things which are offered to you freely in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Let us worship God.

Almighty and eternal God, we worship you with all our being.

We worship you when we are gathered together and when we are alone.

We are constantly amazed at all you do for us – and as we look around at nature, at trees and plants, at sea and sky – we worship you and celebrate all your works. Amen.

The words to 'Jesus calls us!' written by Cecil Frances Alexander [1818-1895] StF 250

1 Jesus calls us! O'er the tumult of our life's wild restless sea,
day by day his voice is sounding, saying: 'Christian, follow me.'

2 As of old Apostles heard it by the Galilean Lake,
turned from home and toil and kindred, leaving all for his dear sake.

3 Jesus calls us from the worship of the vain world's golden store,
from each idol that would keep us, saying: 'Christian, love me more.'

4 In our joys and in our sorrows, days of toil and hours of ease,
still he calls, in cares and pleasures: 'Christian, love me more than these.'

5 Jesus calls us! By your mercies, Saviour, may we hear your call,
give our hearts to your obedience, serve and love you best of all.

Prayer including the Lord's Prayer:

Gracious Father, Holy God, we know you to be just and merciful, wise and compassionate. So with awe and wonder, untainted by fear, we draw close to you to celebrate your promises.

God of love and truth, your Son entered this realm of time and space, living with us – dying for us – rising again, that we too might enjoy life in all its fullness, eternally.

Holy Spirit of God – stable, extrovert, divine: find your way amongst us to transform our living, and make us fit for heaven. Amen.

Lord God, we are troubled by our failings and wrongdoing. We can worry all day and all night.

Forgive us for failing to see you at work.

Thank you that you are there to hear our sorrow – to listen to our confession – to dry our tears and lighten our burden.

O God – hear us and forgive us. Amen.

Our God and Father and the Lord Jesus Christ have heard our confession and answered our plea for forgiveness. Therefore, we may go in peace. Amen.

Great God, Creator, creative and creating – in the midst of time you tell us of eternity, and when we will not listen, you arrive on our earthly doorstep in Jesus Christ, Man of Nazareth, offering life in all its fullness.

Through the life of Jesus, we see the way you intend us to be, forgiving and forgiven – compassionate and cared for – hopeful and hope-bringing: offering love to all the world.

Moving, purposeful Spirit of holiness, yours is the ability to transform fears to faithfulness, tears to singing, darkness to light. Bring faithfulness, music and light to our time of worship now, we pray, as we tell out your greatness, share your graciousness and sing to your glory.

Great God, we come to worship and adore you, for in you is life, light and love. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Luke 19L 1-10 (The revised English Bible with the Apocrypha – copyright Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press 1989)

Entering Jericho, he made his way through the city. There was a man there named Zacchaeus; he was superintendent of taxes and very rich. He was eager to see what Jesus looked like; but, being a little man, he could not see him for the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree in order to see him, for he was to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said: 'Zacchaeus, be quick and come down, for I must stay at your house today.'

He climbed down as quickly as he could and welcomed Jesus gladly. At this there was a general murmur of disapproval. 'he has gone in to be the guest of a sinner,' they said.

But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord: 'here and now, sir, I give half my possessions to charity; and if I have defrauded anyone, I will repay him four times over.'

Jesus said to him: 'Today salvation has come to this house – for this man too is a son of Abraham. The Son of Man has come to seek and to save what is lost.'

Comment:

After last week's fictional tax collector, here is a real one in Zacchaeus, Jericho's chief tax collector. Managing the collection of this prosperous city's taxes would give him ample opportunity to line his own pockets at the expense of others – hence his unpopularity. The little man plots Jesus' route through the city and finds a tree that provides a good view of its visitor, while keeping himself safe from the feisty crowd.

But it is Jesus who finds this lost son of Abraham. He spots Zacchaeus up in the tree – he even knows his name, such is the strength of the man’s reputation.

But Zacchaeus is faced by a stronger power – nothing less than God’s salvation, which brings about a dramatic change in him as Jesus invites himself into Zacchaeus’ world.

The man known for his grasping approach to life promises a far greater generosity than is necessary merely to compensate the victims of his fraudulent ways – and more than makes up for what he has done.

Will the grumbling crowds be willing to celebrate God at work in Jesus’ visit to their city – or will they be more like the older brother [in the parable of the lost-and-found son] who leaves himself out of the party.

At first there seemed something comical in the sight of this little man, lacking dignity, running to climb a tree in his desperation. Jesus takes the initiative and invites himself to share this outsider’s life and that of his unclean friends. Immediately there are grumbles and hostility – the reaction later Christians will come to know as they live the counter-cultural life of the kingdom.

In the context of Luke’s Gospel, the emphasis is on what God is doing in Jesus. The impossible has happened. A rich man has come into the kingdom – the camel has gone through the eye of the needle. A son of Abraham has been recognised and the lost has been found and saved.

Meditation of Zacchaeus. [A Most Amazing Man- year C; by Nick Fawcett. Copyright 2009 Nick Fawcett]

It wasn’t enough simply to say sorry – to admit that I’d made mistakes. Words come cheap, don’t they, eventually counting for nothing, however fine they seem.

I needed to do more, to show that I *meant* what I *said* – and so, there and then, I offered half of my possessions to the poor and promised to repay any I’d defrauded: not just what I owed them but four times as much again.

Generous, you think? Impulsive? Even over the top?

Perhaps, but it was as nothing compared to the riches I’d found in Jesus - the joy of being loved and accepted as I was and allowed to start again.

I’d have sacrificed anything for that, and here it was being offered to me for free – nothing demanded – nothing expected – simply held out to receive.

I could never repay such a gift, still less earn it – and it didn’t occur to me to try, that gesture of mine not a making amends or settling the debt, but a way of saying thank you and sorry rolled into one. An expressing of what I felt, not just in words, but deeds.

Prayer:

Forgive us, Lord, for too often we say sorry to you and others, but don’t really mean it – our lives giving the lie to our words.

Though we cannot earn forgiveness, still less deserve it, help us to show the sincerity of our repentance through a real desire to change and to express our gratitude for your unfailing mercy through making amends whenever and wherever we can. Amen.

Merciful God, we pray for those who walk through life with a sense of guilt – burdened by past mistakes – overwhelmed by a sense of failure – troubled by feelings of shame – depressed by the knowledge of their own weakness.

Help them to understand that in you they can find true forgiveness and a new beginning.

We pray for those who commit evil with no sense of wrong-doing – no concept of sin – no hint of remorse – no sign of scruples.

Help them to glimpse what is right and good, and to be touched by the renewing, transforming grace of Christ.

We pray for those who have been wronged by others – those who have been hurt – deceived – betrayed – let down.

Help them to be ready to forgive others as you have forgiven us.

We pray finally for one another – in our relationships with family and friends – in our relationships at work or leisure – in our relationships in fellowship – in our relationships with any other Christians. Help us to recognise any divisions or grievances there may be between us – and help us to work towards the healing of all such rifts – forgiving and seeking forgiveness.

Merciful God, help all in your world to discover the mercy you so freely offer, and to show that mercy in turn – to be ready to put the past behind them, and to begin again through your grace.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen.

The words to ‘God forgave my sin’ written by Carol Owens [b.1931]

Singing the Faith 424

God forgave my sin in Jesus’ name.

I’ve been born again in Jesus’ name,

And in Jesus’ name I come to you

To share his love as he told me to:

Refrain: he said, ‘Freely, freely you have received, freely, freely give,

Go in my name and because you believe, people will know that I live.

All power is given in Jesus’ name,

I’ve been born again in Jesus’ name,

And in Jesus’ name I come to you

To share his love as he told me to. *Refrain*.....

Close:

Grace to you from God our Father.

Peace to you from our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Go with everything you have been given by God.

Go with everything he will help you to be.

Go in peace. Amen.

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