

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time - C

Why would Jesus want to stay at the home of Zacchaeus?

The Gospel story tells us that “Jesus was passing through Jericho.”

It’s doubtful that Jesus knew Zacchaeus from before.

So, why would Jesus want to stay at the home of Zacchaeus?

What we know about Zacchaeus is that he was the chief tax collector, that he was short in stature, but the most important bit of information is that he ran ahead of Jesus and climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus.

Zacchaeus was interested. He wasn’t indifferent to Jesus’ arrival. He wants to “see” Jesus, to grasp what he’s all about, to know where he’s coming from.

For their part, the crowd is an obstacle, a symbol of spiritual dullness and lack of understanding.

They block the true view of Jesus that Zacchaeus desires.

From the sycamore tree Zacchaeus gains a higher perspective, a beginning understanding of “who Jesus is.”

That’s all Jesus needs. He may have had to ask someone, “Who’s that fellow in the sycamore tree?” But what he knew already was that there was someone open to what he had to say.

With this person he was already receiving a welcome. So, he calls out, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.”

Zacchaeus was happy to welcome him.

This dynamic has theological meaning: The sinner must show enough interest to turn and get to a place where he can be seen.

But he does not have to crawl the whole way back.

Humans must overcome obstacles and get into position, so to speak, but once Zacchaeus has managed to climb the tree, it is Jesus who seizes the moment.

Grace is always waiting and watching. When the situation presents itself, grace moves quickly and effectively: “Hurry down, I must stay at your house today.”

When Jesus says he wants to stay at Zacchaeus’ house, it symbolizes that Jesus wants to dwell within him, to shape his consciousness and transform it.

This desire must resonate with Zacchaeus’ own reason for seeking out Jesus because he hurries down and happily welcomes him.

In fact, Zacchaeus is so happy to welcome Jesus that when others begin to object, Zacchaeus stands his ground.

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He recognizes the importance of the moment and is not about to let it pass.

His happiness to welcome Jesus leads him to commit himself to a transformation of his life: He will give half of his possessions to the poor and pay back four times over anything that he has gained unjustly.

We don't often equate the call to conversion with a feeling of happiness. We may recognize the need, we may come to the conclusion that we can't go on the way we have been living, but being happy to be converted to Jesus' way of living might escape us.

But the bottom line of conversion is that it is the discovery of our true selves.

This coming home to the truth about us is, quite simply, better than any of the substitutes we have embraced.

That is why the man who discovers the treasure in the field "in joy...goes and sells all he has and buys that field."
(Mt. 13:44)

In the presence of the Son of Man, people find out what they were made for. And what they were made for was so much better than what they were caught in that they welcomed it with joy.

What's holding us back from finding that out in our case: fear? the comfort

of what we know? false impressions of what our own plans will bring?

Zacchaeus took a chance. He let his desire to see Jesus put him in a position for grace to find him. And when the moment arrived, he did not let anything get in the way of embracing it.

I pray that we might let our desire for God and God's truth lead us in the same way, that we may discover the joy of finding our true selves, the people we were born to be.