

**“Thans4giving”**  
**Giving it Back! Zacchaeus Got it Right”**  
**11/21/10**

Text: Luke 19:1-10

I am grateful to Anne for her stewardship sermons over the last couple of weeks. In a number of ways I suspect Anne has challenged all of us.

Some of what we’ve heard has probably resonated with us and has moved us and some of what we’ve heard perhaps has made us shift in our seats...not because of Anne’s preaching...but inevitably when congregations talk about the realities of time, talent and treasure...our faith becomes very personal and whenever anything is personal...we often experience challenging dynamics.

Well...I’m glad that Anne addressed head-on the question she was asked by many after her first stewardship sermon. “When you say tithe...what does this mean...do I/we give ten percent of our gross or net income?” If you were here last Sunday...Anne’s answer to this question could not have been more clear: “Tithe on your gross income...give first to God before Caesar.”

Well...if you’re shifting in your seat and wondering where I’m going with this...I’d like to quote one of Calvary’s former Senior Pastors...Larry Loughhead...who was once asked this same question. Upon hearing the question...do I give on my gross or net income...Larry is

said to have answered: “I don’t care...just choose one and make sure you tithe!”

If the Old Testament concept of the tithe—giving ten percent of our income to God’s work—and specifically God’s work through a local congregation—sounds and seems challenging...we ought to be grateful that Jesus isn’t around in our days like he was for folk in the early first century. Folk like the man we meet in our text today often were challenged to give far more than ten percent of their means away.

This story of Jesus and Zacchaeus is an interesting and intriguing one. We learn some things about this chief tax collector and we learn some things about Jesus that may just give us cause to pause.

At one level this story of Zacchaeus meeting Jesus provides some comic relief for the gospel. And it is perhaps timely comic relief—a man of notoriety—a person of means climbing a tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus processing by. Surely...this would have made folk chuckle.

You see, in just a couple of chapters from our text the pomp and circumstance of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem (which comes just after this story with Zacchaeus) will turn to the dark and dim shadows of the cross. And so...we can imagine...the gospel writer is giving us as readers some reprieve before the challenge of Calvary presents itself. Before the story of Jesus becomes one of capital punishment and a cruel and grisly death.

Zacchaeus...is not just a tax collector—but he was a chief tax collector. Tax collectors in Jesus’ day were not likeable people—they were sell-outs—they were neighbors with their Jewish sisters and brothers who became bedfellows with the Roman government. In short...they were collecting taxes for the Romans and making a profit themselves which did not win them any favor with their friends.

And so...here in Luke 19...Jesus interacts with not just a collector of taxes...but with a chief collector...with someone who was doubly unlikeable...and yet...Jesus some how...for some reason...took time to visit with such unlikeable individuals.

To his credit...as the story is told...Zacchaeus seemingly sees and hears something in Jesus that causes him to make some radical decisions...he doesn’t want to live the way he had...he doesn’t want to continue benefiting unfairly at the expense of others...he chooses to make things right...whatever Jesus said...whatever Zacchaeus understood...made Zacchaeus decide to give up so much of what he had.

Forget about the tithe...Zacchaeus gives half of his possessions to the poor and commits to making right any wrongs he had made against folk...in other words...he was willing to put his money where his mouth was...

Who knows...if Zacchaeus was as wealthy as Bill Gates or Warren Buffet...I suppose it wasn't too much of a sacrifice to give up half his wealth because he'd still have a comfortable means to live on...although...the point is still that Zacchaeus gave up a lot...

I wonder what we're willing to give up?

It seems to me that Zacchaeus was compelled to make a difference in the lives of others...I wonder what difference we want to make in others' lives?

At one level this story is about the arrived-at-selflessness of an individual. When we think about our lives...and all we have...I wonder how selfless we are when it comes to giving and doing what we can for the cause of God's kingdom...and even the cause of God's kingdom known as Calvary Baptist Church of Denver?

Now...allow me to offer a bit of a side comment about this text here in Luke...and a side comment about the Greek text upon which most of our translations are made. Beginning at an early age...we learn this story through song...don't we?

*Zacchaeus was a wee little and wee little man was he...Zacchaeus climbed a sycamore tree for his Lord he wanted to see...and Jesus said...Zacchaeus come down for I'm going to your house today...*

But you see...the Greek text isn't this clear. We don't know for sure who the "short" man in this text is really. It could be Zacchaeus...but the pronoun "he" in the Greek could also be used for Jesus. Was Zacchaeus climbing a tree because he was short and wanted to see above the crowd? or did Zacchaeus climb the tree because he could not see Jesus in the crowd...because Jesus was too short to be seen?

This makes us think, doesn't it? I don't know about you...but the images of Jesus I conjure up in my head are often heroic-like. I mean think about it...any film ever made about Jesus...usually has at least an average to moderately taller individual playing Jesus' role. And usually the actors playing Jesus are the type that stand out in a crowd. They're handsome and look the part...they're usually not unusually short...

If Jesus was short...perhaps this made him more marginalized than we often think...Jesus stood out because of his unusual way of spending time with folk who others least wanted to spend time with...Jesus stood out because he walked the way of love and peace...perhaps Jesus stood out too because of his height, or lack thereof?

One thing for sure...in just a few chapters after this encounter with Zacchaeus...Jesus stood out...and regardless of his height and stature...he stood out because he hung on the cross giving Zacchaeus and you and me and everyone the world-over an example of true

selflessness...he gave us an example of stewardship that we ought not forget...

Jesus gave up for you and for me...Jesus gave up for the world...not just his time, talent and treasure...he gave up his life.

My prayer for us here at Calvary...is that we will recognize that stewardship is not just a season but it is to be our life-style. We like Zacchaeus...and even greater, like Jesus, can make an impact in the lives of others by the way we live out our lives...by the way we share all we have...even our means.

For the cause of Christ...for the work of Jesus' Calvary...for the work of love...what will you give...how much can you offer? I am passionate about the work that I believe God is doing and will do through *our* Calvary at 6500 East Girard Avenue...

I pray we will consider what matters most and how we may simply give so that the Good News of our risen Savior continues to be told and experienced among and within and through you and me. Amen.