



July 27, 2014

Vacation Bible School Sermon Series – Who Is Like the LORD?

4. **SANCTIFICATION** – God makes us holy by sending us His Holy Spirit who enables us to believe in Jesus and empowers us to do good works

Luke 19:2-10

Zacchaeus was an unlikely character to receive a visit from Jesus. He was a tax collector; he was rich; and he was short. Tax collectors were among the outcasts of Jewish society in the days of Jesus. They were the toll keepers – empowered by the Roman government to collect taxes from their Jewish countrymen. Because there was little oversight, tax-collectors were able to swindle well beyond what they needed. Their work also required constant interaction with Gentiles (non-Jews), making them ritually unclean according religious practices. The very title they bore became associated with greed, treason, and sin.

To be an unclean Israelite according to Old Testament Laws meant you were separated from the worshipping community. The only Israelites allowed to offer sacrifices in the Temple were those who were clean and who had been sanctified (made holy). God's presence in Israel was holy (set apart) and to gain access to God's presence in worship the unclean meant the worshipper must also be holy. The work of making holy is called "sanctification." In order to return to fellowship with God's people, the tax-collector would need to be purified by a priest. This involved restoring all he had ever taken wrongfully, finding a new occupation, and being approved by the priests.

How many aspects of our life have a similar lack of oversight? What parts of our lives reveal our own uncleanness? Maybe we have swindled well beyond our needs at the expense of others. Maybe the luxuries we enjoy force parents to work long hours and those who need us at home are neglected. Maybe there are other sins, guilt from the past, sins that keep on coming into our lives that separate us from the worshipping community. Like Zacchaeus, we come up short: "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."

But regardless, Jesus spots him in the crowd and calls him by name: "Zacchaeus!" Zacchaeus was too short and couldn't see over the crowd, so he climbed a tree to get a better look. There Jesus spots him – the unlikely Zacchaeus, the outcast tax-collector. He calls him to come down quickly, "For today I must stay at your house." A visit from God's Son, meant Zacchaeus was entering God's holiness. All of his uncleanness and all of his sins were purified by the voice and presence of Jesus. Zacchaeus believed in Jesus and so Jesus says: "Today salvation has come to this house."

The work of God's Holy Spirit is to enable us to believe. In his catechism, Martin Luther explains the third article of the Apostles' Creed this way: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy

Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified, and kept me in true faith.”

It isn't by our stature or strength or clever reasoning that we find Jesus. Neither is it by our cleanness and holy works that God finds us. Rather God spots us unexpectedly. We are the unlikely characters that Jesus singles out and calls by name. He sees a sinner, an outcast, one too short for His glory.

Today's lesson is about “sanctification.” Sanctification means “to make holy”; that is, to gain access to God's holy presence. In other words, the work of the Holy Spirit is to make us special and invite us into the worshipping community. He brings us into God's presence by lifting us up to see Jesus and His cross and His resurrection. In the waters of baptism God calls you by name and makes you His special child – not by reason or strength, but by His call and His grace. There is no child too small, there is no sinner too sinful for this Gospel. As Paul writes: *And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:11).* So the Spirit enables us to believe in Jesus and empowers us to do good works.

Zacchaeus was empowered to walk in holiness. Because salvation had come to him so freely and undeservedly, it filled him with gratitude. Normally when it was discovered that a tax-collector had taken something wrongfully, he was required to restore double. Zacchaeus restores four-fold. Normally a tax-collector was not known for generosity, but Zacchaeus gives half of his goods to the poor. The Spirit empowered him to repent, believe, and do good for others.

We are empowered with that same Spirit. For Jesus dwells with us and freely gives us of His holiness. This empowers us to walk in Him, to sacrifice what we otherwise would not sacrifice and to serve those whom we would otherwise not be inclined to serve. The Spirit makes us special, makes us grateful, and leads us to live and do His will.

No need to feel short anymore – you are forgiven; you are holy; you can stand tall!

