

Mondovi: Our Savior's, Gilmanton & Montana: Salem United Methodist Churches
11.2.2025, 21st Sunday after Pentecost, Rev. Hyuntae Kim, Ph.D.

From the Sycamore Tree to the Lord

Luke 19:1–10

Let us pray: Lord God, whenever we hear your Word, help us to understand the mystery of Christ within it. Fill us more with Jesus, and through the anointing he gives us, may we bear the fruits of life. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

What comes to mind when you hear “secret room”? Perhaps one of the Harry Potter series? Or the old wardrobe in The Chronicles of Narnia that leads into Narnia? Truly, the most astonishing secrets are found in the room of God’s Word.

Colossians 2 tells us that we are called to understand Christ, who is the mystery of God. I hope we will strive even more to know this mystery—Christ Himself.

In the previous chapter, Luke 18, we met a tax collector who prayed. But here in chapter 19, we meet not just a tax collector but *the chief tax collector*. In those days, tax collectors were despised by the Jews because they collaborated with Rome, often collecting more than was required and pocketing the excess. They were viewed as traitors and sinners. The chief tax collector would have been considered an even greater sinner—wealthy, powerful, and corrupt. Yet today, that very man meets Jesus and is transformed into a steward of heaven’s treasury.

Jesus was passing through Jericho, a city that Joshua had cursed in his time, declaring it should never be rebuilt. Though it was rebuilt centuries later, the curse still lingered. Christ’s entry into this city signifies His mission to break that curse.

How is the curse broken? Christ bears it Himself. He becomes the one cursed, so that we may be freed. By His wounds, we are healed. And in that very place, a man named Zacchaeus is transferred from death to life.

Jesus is currently passing through Jericho on His journey toward Jerusalem. He is heading there to enter as King, to restore the Kingdom of God. And along the way, we see Him gathering those who will be part of that Kingdom.

Luke introduces Zacchaeus by saying, “A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy.” There’s a hidden meaning in the name Zacchaeus. His name means “pure.” In Hebrew tradition, names are deeply connected to God. So Zacchaeus’ name essentially means “God is pure,” and by extension, his life

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was meant to reflect the purity of God. But Zacchaeus lived a life far removed from the meaning of his name.

The name Zacchaeus is a Greek form of the Hebrew name Zakkai, which also appears in the Old Testament. In Ezra 2:9 and Nehemiah 7:14, Zakkai is listed among the leaders who returned from Babylon to help rebuild the walls of Jerusalem with Nehemiah. It's recorded that he brought back 760 descendants. The number 700 symbolizes God's complete abundance, and 60 is derived from multiplying 6 (representing humanity) by 10 (symbolizing completeness)—suggesting that Zakkai brought people who had been made whole.

There was another Zakkai, a hero of the Maccabean revolt in 167 BC, who helped lead Israel to independence from the Syrian Empire.

So Zacchaeus bore a name shared by a patriarch who rebuilt Jerusalem and a patriot who fought for Israel's freedom—but he had not lived up to that name. Yet when Jesus came to him, the meaning of his name—purity and righteousness—was fulfilled. Just as Zakkai in the Old Testament brought many people back to Jerusalem, Zacchaeus in the New Testament will bring many into the Kingdom of the Lord.

Zacchaeus “wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd.” His desire to see who Jesus was reflects a longing to know Christ intellectually. And that, too, is a commendable desire. But more important than knowing what kind of person Jesus is, is coming to know who He is to you personally.

Zacchaeus' short stature refers to his physical condition, but for us today, it speaks to our spiritual condition. Even when we want to see Jesus, our spiritual “shortness” often keeps us from seeing Him clearly. Another reason we may not see Christ is because there are simply too many people. Trying to meet Christ in the midst of the crowd can make it impossible. Each of us needs to encounter Christ personally and intimately.

To see Jesus more clearly, Zacchaeus ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree, “because Jesus was going to pass that way.” We, too, must have that same earnest desire and attitude to meet Jesus, just like Zacchaeus.

And look—there just happened to be a sycamore tree on that very road. Isn't it something to be thankful for? Who could have known Zacchaeus would need to climb it

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that day? Friends, when we long to see Christ, the Lord has already planted sycamore trees along the path of our lives.

The sycamore-fig tree was often planted along public roads, and even the poor could freely pick its fruit. It symbolized abundance for all. And who is the true food for all people? Is it not Christ? The sycamore tree represents the incarnate Jesus Christ, planted along the roadside of this world like Jericho, the cursed city. It also represents those who are united with Him and used by Him to help others see and meet the Lord.

I remember the Sunday School teachers, pastors, and elders who fed me the sweet gospel like figs from a sycamore tree. They were like those trees to me—lifting me up so I could see Christ. Perhaps the ones you remember today, on this All Saints Sunday, played a similar role in your life. Now, we too are called to be sycamore trees for others—offering spiritual nourishment and lifting them up so they can see Christ.

When Jesus reached the spot where Zacchaeus was, He looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately” (v. 5a). Zacchaeus was looking down, and the Lord was looking up. This is how our Lord humbly enters into our lives—He looks up at us and speaks, “Come down immediately.” This is the voice He speaks to us today. It is a call to move forward in knowing Him more deeply.

Then Jesus said, “I must stay at your house today” (v. 5b). This is one of the most beautiful statements in all of Scripture. He didn’t say, “I’m thinking about staying,” but “I must.” It’s not optional—it’s essential for your life. We are not meant to see Jesus from a distance, perched on a sycamore tree. We are called to welcome Him into our house—into our hearts—and to enjoy Him personally. This is a new stage of faith.

Verse 6 tells us, “So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.” This is one of the most important verses in today’s passage.

Christ first dwells in our spirit. But we must also invite Him into the other rooms of our inner life—our emotions, our thoughts, our desires. When we fill those rooms with the Word of the Lord, He can truly dwell there.

Zacchaeus stood and spoke to the Lord. Like Zacchaeus, we too stand before Christ. Sometimes, when we read Scripture, it feels as though we’re still up in the sycamore tree, looking down to see what kind of person Jesus is. But then, through the branches

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of the Word, we meet Him—and we hear the personal word He speaks to us. That's when we come down and stand before Him. And in those moments, personal prayer begins to flow.

Likewise, standing before Christ, Zacchaeus says, *"Look, Lord!"* and begins to make a personal confession: *"Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor"* (v. 8). This reminds us of the promise Jesus made earlier in Luke 18: *"No one who has left home ... or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much..."* (Luke 18:29–30).

Zacchaeus continues his confession: with the remaining half, he will repay four times the amount to anyone he has cheated. In the end, he offers all his wealth to Christ. Zacchaeus, who climbed the sycamore tree and became its sweet fruit by meeting Jesus, now becomes a sycamore tree himself—feeding the poor with his fruit.

Jesus responds, *"Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham"* (Luke 19:9). To be a son of Abraham means to be a person of faith. And here, we glimpse the mystery of Christ. Galatians 3:16 says that the seed of Abraham is Christ Jesus. So when Jesus calls Zacchaeus a son of Abraham, He is declaring that Zacchaeus is now united with Christ—he belongs to Him.

Finally, Jesus says, *"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost"* (v. 10). This Jericho moment has happened to us as well. Somewhere, the Lord is still walking into the lives of people like Zacchaeus—as a sycamore tree planted along their path.

May we, like Zacchaeus, be transformed into fruitful sycamore trees—lifting others up to see Christ, feeding the hungry with the sweetness of the gospel, and revealing the purity of God through our lives. Amen.

Let us pray: Father God, thank You for making Jesus like a sycamore tree, so that we may see You. Thank You also for giving us people who, like sycamore trees, lift us up to meet Jesus. Help us to take Your Word as that tree, so that we may encounter You anew each day and be continually made new. And help us to become those trees for others—lifting them up so they too may see the Lord. We pray in the name of Jesus, who came to seek and save the lost. Amen.