

Nov. 22, 2020
The Kingdom of God (4)
An Open Door Policy
Luke 19:1-10
Rev. Dr. Charles Yoon

Today's text is the well-known story of Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was a tax collector living in Jericho. He was not a popular guy because he cheated the people of Jericho. He was one of the most influential, but disliked, people in his community. One day Zacchaeus heard that Jesus was going to be passing through town. He was curious about Him and he wanted to see Him. So, he joined the crowd and tried to get a look at Him. But he was quite short. So, he ran ahead of the crowd and climbed up a tree where Jesus was going to be walking. Zacchaeus made himself ready to see Jesus. As Jesus walked by, He stopped right by that tree and looked up at Zacchaeus and said, "*Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.*" (5) Zacchaeus came out of the tree and welcomed Jesus and all the disciples.

While Jesus was at his house, Zacchaeus heard His words, spent time with Him, and ate with Him. He believed what Jesus was saying. He made an announcement that he pledged to give away half of what he owned and he was going to repay the people by giving them four times the amount that he had cheated them out of over the years. Jesus made an even bigger statement. "*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.*" (10) This summed up the heart of the Gospel. Jesus came to save the lost. He stated it in very clear terms in Zacchaeus' house. Zacchaeus fit in that category. He was lost. The disciples fit into that category and we fit into it as well. Jesus came to save the lost.

In today's text I would like to think of what it means to be people of the Kingdom of God. What it means to serve in the Kingdom of God, and what it means to be a member of the Kingdom of God. There are three different parts to this story that will give us some perspective on how we can respond to what God is doing in our role as members of the Kingdom of God. The first part is initiative. In today's story

Jesus took the initiative in dealing with Zacchaeus. Jesus walked by, called Zacchaeus to come out of the tree, and told him He wanted to go to his house. That was obviously initiative on Jesus' part. But Jesus was not the only one taking the initiative that day. Zacchaeus also took some initiative. He wasn't at home sitting in his living room, hoping that Jesus might come to his house and knock on his door. He didn't sit at home waiting. So, what did he do? He took the initiative to go out to where Jesus was going to be. He climbed a tree so that he could be sure he would be able to see Jesus. He didn't have any idea what was going to happen. But he really wanted to see Jesus. The scripture says Jesus was planning to pass through Jericho. But, He visited and stayed at Zacchaeus' house. Would Zacchaeus have been saved if he had not taken that initiative to go to where he knew Jesus would be and if he had decided to stay home that day? We know that God always takes the first step toward us. Scripture is very clear about that. Jesus came to earth to be among us and die for us. That is the ultimate first step. God doesn't push His way into our lives though. He takes the first step, but He is not a pushy God.

In Revelation 3:20 Jesus says, "*Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.*" Even now, Jesus is standing at the door knocking. He is asking to be invited in. He is not breaking the lock. He is not pushing the door open. Zacchaeus took the initiative by getting to a place where Jesus was going to be and then, when Jesus called to him, he opened the door.

The second part of this story is response. Logically, we need to take an initiative first; and then we need to respond to whatever happens in response to our initial action, our initiative. It is the series of initiative and response in today's text. Jesus took a trip to Jericho (Jesus' initiative). Zacchaeus sought Him out (Zacchaeus' initiative). Jesus called to Zacchaeus to come down from the tree and be his host for the night (Jesus' more initiative). Zacchaeus responded and said okay (Zacchaeus' response). Jesus interacted with Zacchaeus throughout the course of the evening (Jesus' initiative). Zacchaeus ended up with a newfound faith (Zacchaeus' response). That's his additional response. Then Jesus responded again with assurance of salvation (Jesus' response). Initiative and response: That is the core

of our relationships with our family and friends and the core of our relationship with the Lord. It is the core of all relationships – initiating and responding, back and forth, and the balance between God’s initiative and our initiative and God’s response and our response. It is a powerful, powerful combination. When that combination is played out in the way God has intended for it to be played out within the Kingdom of God, powerful things happen.

When Jesus called Zacchaeus out of the tree, he could have responded in an entirely different way. He could have said, “Hah, I don’t think so, all I wanted to know was a little bit more. I didn’t think you were going to be coming to my house tonight. I’m not ready for you. What am I going to feed you? I don’t have any way to feed this whole group of guys behind you. They are not coming with you.” His response could have been entirely different. But, in the rest of this passage, Jesus tells us how important Zacchaeus’ response was to Jesus’ invitation. In the same way, our response to Jesus is important. We have a choice. We can accept the invitation that Jesus puts before us and we can have a significant, meaningful relationship with Him. Or we can choose to remain among the crowd, curious about Jesus, wanting to know a little bit more, but not really wanting that intimate relationship with Him. When we invite Him into our lives, He can tell us and share with us and love us. The people of Jericho thought that Zacchaeus was way too wicked to be saved. But Jesus made very clear what the result has for Zacchaeus. Jesus said, *“Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.”* (9) When Jesus said salvation has come to Zacchaeus’ house, his disciples got a new understanding of what the Kingdom of God was and how wide and how big and how all-inclusive it was. And Zacchaeus’ response was amazing. He looked at Jesus and said, *“Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”* (8) This was not the heart of a man who was still thinking about making more money and accumulating more wealth. This was a transformed person. Zacchaeus was changed and his life would be different from that point on.

This third point is that God has an open door policy with us all the time. God wants that relationship with us whether we are the best or

the worst, whether we follow the law or we break the law, whether we faithfully try to live according to God’s will and further His kingdom or we don’t know what it means to do that. God has an open door policy with those like Zacchaeus and those like you and me. God’s door is open to us. No matter what we may be feeling or what we may be experiencing, no matter what’s going on in our lives at any given moment, God is waiting for us to respond. God is there, waiting. God does not change in His willingness to talk to us or His willingness to interact with us. He has taken the initiative and He is inviting our response. Jesus is saying *“Listen, (put your name in there)* I am standing at the door knocking. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come into your home and eat with you and you with me.” He is talking to each one of us. He is asking to be invited in. Jesus is knocking on that door, saying *“I want to come into that room.”* Wherever we are, God’s door is open to us and He is asking us to open the door to Him. We are always welcome to enter into that significant relationship with Him. Let us invite Him in. Let us take the initiative to go deeper in our relationship with God regardless of where we are now. God’s response is always the same. It’s a response of love and relationship and commitment to us, whom He loves more than anything. I hope we, as a congregation and as individuals, would be people who open the door of our lives to all that God wants to do with us. So, we seek to faithfully be a corner of the kingdom of God in this place at Faith Church, and to stay in the Kingdom of God everywhere that we go through the course of the week. Let us be people who faithfully live as people responding to God’s faithfulness to us.

Let’s pray. Holy and loving God, You are so faithful to us and we thank You for that. God, sometimes we feel like Zacchaeus up in that tree and You are calling us to come down and sometimes we are hesitant. But we know that as we do that, You are faithful to us and want to interact with us and to love us and to share with us and to encourage us and to declare to us that salvation is ours because of what You have done for us on the cross. So, God, we ask that You would give us He courage like Zacchaeus to come down out of that tree, to interact with You in a way that will change our lives forever. Thank You for Your love and Your presence. Hear us now as we continue to worship. In the name of Jesus, Amen.