

**Palm Harbor United Methodist Church**  
**June 28, 2020**  
**Rev. Sharon Patch**  
**ARE YOU ALL IN? Luke 19:1-10 and James 1:22-25**

Our church's vision is: All ages, all in, Loving God, loving all. Last week we talked about being an intergenerational church...a church for all ages. This morning we are going to look at the second part of that vision: "all in." The children's message gave us a hint of what it means to be "all in." The children are all in, are you?

In our scripture lesson from Luke 19, we find the story of Zacchaeus a man who was definitely on the outside. He was a Jew but he was the chief tax collector for the Roman's. He had position and power but he, like many in his day used that position and power to cheat those he taxed. He was rich but he was also very much alone. To the Romans, he was just another conquered Jew. To the Jews, he was an agent of Rome and a dishonest one at that. He was wealthy but very much alone.

Hear now the story. READ SCRIPTURE.

Jesus was just traveling through Jericho and because of the miracles he had been performing, he had drawn quite a crowd. Zacchaeus had heard about Jesus and he just wanted to get a look at him. Zacchaeus was like Danny DeVito...like a Smurf or a Troll, he was really short. He decided that the only way he was going to get a view of Jesus was to run ahead and climb up in the sycamore tree. He certainly **didn't expect Jesus to spot him up there**. He was probably even more surprised when Jesus called him by name and ordered him to come down. How embarrassing! Not only was he being ordered around by this itinerant preacher, but it was in front of the whole town and they were all looking up at him sitting there in the tree. As powerful as he was, at the moment he was just a wee little man perched in a tree. Kids, do you remember the **song, Zacchaeus** was a wee little man and a wee little man was he. Maybe you can sing it for your parents later.

Apparently, Jesus had heard about Zacchaeus because he called him by name. Zacchaeus, come down! I can just hear him: **"Come down out of that tree. Stop embarrassing yourself. Don't be afraid. I am here and I want to help you, as a matter of fact, I'm going to your house to stay today."**

Apparently Jesus missed the good manners lesson about not inviting yourself to other people's house. Zacchaeus could have refused but he didn't. He climbed down from the tree trying to maintain as much decorum as possible...and as he **drew closer to Jesus, his heart was transformed**. Jesus didn't touch him. Jesus didn't tell him he was a cheat. The crowd was grumbling that Zacchaeus was a sinner but what Jesus saw was a man who needed saving. Zacchaeus apparently sensed that he was in the presence of the Holy One. He repented. He was **so sorry** he had cheated the people that he offered to give back all that he had taken from them and even more.

Do you **remember when you first met Jesus?** I know for some of you, it was like growing up with a big brother you always admired and tried to emulate. Jesus was a part of your home and family growing up. But, for others, you were like Zacchaeus, when you met Jesus, it was a very special life changing moment. Regardless of whether you developed a relationship with Jesus in one special significant moment or simply grew in your faith, at some point you had to make a decision. Whether it was during a Confirmation Class or your baptism, in a worship service or at some other significant moment, you made a **commitment to follow Jesus. This morning there may be someone watching who has not made that commitment, if so**, I encourage you to open your heart and step into that circle of love and allow the love of Jesus to fill you and surround you. Commit your life to following Jesus. If you would like someone to pray with you, please let us know on our website. This is important. A loving relationship with Jesus can be life transforming.

I wonder just how much Zacchaeus life was transformed. When **Jesus left Jericho did Zacchaeus go with him?** Or, did Zacchaeus stay in Jericho and **testify** to his friends and neighbors and the people that he had cheated, about the life changing power of Jesus. Did he simply return to his tax collecting, hopefully, with more honesty? It all depends on the **level of commitment he was willing to make**.

It takes a **very high level of commitment to leave everything to follow Jesus**. It takes a **high level of commitment** to tell others what Jesus has done for you. It takes a good deal of **commitment** to make sure

that whatever you are doing in your daily life is in accordance with the teachings of Jesus. It takes only a **little commitment** to keep your faith a secret.

**What does it mean when we say we are “all in?”** I believe that it means that we are making a high level of commitment to follow Jesus. We are not only willing to share with others what Jesus has done for us, we are reaching out to those who are lonely, isolated, and up a tree. Perhaps they don't know what they need in order for their lives to have more purpose and meaning. We are all in if we step outside our comfort zone and tell them about Jesus. We are “all in” if we are willing to do our part to help others experience the transformation that only Jesus can offer.

This week I had a visit from one of our members, **Joe Lowry**. Joe is in charge of our prison ministry but he came to the office because he remembered that I am a big baseball fan. He is a scorekeeper for the Yankee's minor league team and he brought me a game ball. That was so very thoughtful of him. As we talked, he told me about hearing about another man named, Joe Lowry, whose sister was friends with his sister. He did not know this stranger, but he knew from his sister that this man was not a Christian. He wrote to him and suggested that since they had the same name and since their sisters were friends that they should get acquainted. The other Joe agreed and they began talking by phone. This other Joe Lowry lives in Texas and is in his 80s and is now in the hospital. Joe wants to go visit him as soon as his new friend is able to receive visitors. He wants to share his faith with him. Joe shares his faith with those who are incarcerated and he is ready to travel across the country to share his love for Jesus with someone who is virtually a stranger. I would say Joe is “all in.” He has a very high level of commitment to following Jesus.

I read a quote this week that said, **“Ask yourself if what you are doing today is getting you where you want to be tomorrow.”** That could apply to many aspects of our lives but what if we apply it to our relationship with Jesus. Is what you are doing today going to draw you closer to Jesus tomorrow and the day after? Is what you are doing going to increase your level of commitment to follow Jesus?

Hear these words that come to us from the book of James. (POST JAMES 1:22-27 ON THE SCREEN.). **“Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror, for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget, but doers who act – they will be blessed in their doing.”**

If we are going to be “all in” it will require us to look in the mirror and **examine our level of commitment**. Jesus has called us to come down from our own trees. We cannot be content to observe what is going on with Jesus and others. **We are called first to repentance.** Then, we are called to become not just hearers of Jesus' but to become followers of Jesus.

We don't know **what happened to Zacchaeus after Jesus left Jericho** but I do know that it can be **difficult to sustain and grow your faith**. I would hope that Zacchaeus' life was so changed that he no longer was ostracized but instead he was welcomed as he testified both in word and deed to what Jesus had done for him. I've often wondered what happened to the **blind man** who had his sight restored by Jesus, the leper who was cleansed, the lame man who was suddenly able to walk, the ones who were possessed by demons who were made whole. What happened to them afterwards? We know that there was a huge crowd of people who gathered around Jesus and traveled with him. Were they part of the crowd, or did they simply return to their normal lives. Were their lives totally transformed not just physically but also spiritually? **Did they become witnesses and highly committed followers of Jesus? Were they “all in?”**

So, this morning I would like us to ask ourselves if **we are “all in.”** **How high is your commitment?** I know it has been very challenging over these past weeks when we haven't been able to meet together for Bible study and for worship in person. We need the support and encouragement we get when we gather together. Right now, we don't know when we will be able to return but we are prepared to return when the time comes and it feels safer. In the meantime, I invite you to **look in the mirror. Do you see a highly committed follower of Jesus? Are you “all in.”**

My guess is that many of us are able to do a great deal more than we did before this virus closed us down. This may be the time to pray about your level of commitment and where and how you can use your gifts, talents and witness to serve here in the church and in the community. Even under these difficult circumstances there are things we all can do. We can study our Bibles and try to better understand what Jesus would want us to do. We can pray. We can call those who may need an encouraging word. We can send notes and cards. We can tell others about our faith and invite them to join us during our online services, ask for prayer requests, and be an encourager. You can volunteer. **You can sign up now so that when we do reopen, we will have a sufficient number of volunteers.**

If you are good with **technology**, we need additional volunteers to help with broadcasting our services. When we open we will need more parking attendants to direct traffic in our parking lots and more helpers in our children's department since some of our most devoted workers are among the vulnerable. **You have been given gifts and talents and Jesus wants you to come down out of that tree where you have been hiding and come follow him. Be doers of the word by putting those gifts and talents to work for the sake of the gospel.**

The point is that when Jesus called you to come follow him, you committed yourself to not just be hearers of the word but to be "all in" doers of the word.