

Talents
Luke 19: 1-10; Psalm 139:13-18
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Why are you here? Why did you come to church this morning? Surely it wasn't just to see me?! I'm sure that you had other things you could have done this morning. You could have stayed home and played with your children, gotten work done, gone out to breakfast or even slept in. So why did you get up this morning, drive your car all the way out here, and come to sit here for an hour on these uncomfortable pews that make your butt go numb?

Did you come for the choir? Or maybe you came for the fellowship of Christian friends? Some of you may have even come for the refreshments, the sermon, or the worship leader. Most of us came for what the church can offer us. But how many came for what we can offer the church? Or each other? Our story today has to do with what we can offer others. It is a parable about using what we have wisely.

.... Oh wait... no it's not. Does this sermon sound familiar? It should. This is the beginning of the sermon that I preached about 3 months ago. That was during the sermon series on talents and calls. I think you have now have had plenty of time to think about your talents. What are you good at???

That's what I was afraid of.

So this is what we are going to do. Each of you received 2 blank pieces of paper in your bulletin today. I want you to take them out. Now on the first sheet of paper, I want you to write what you are good at. I'll give you time (wait... wait... wait for them).

(If they are having problems, ask them what they like to do in their jobs... what part they are good at doing)

Count how many items are on your list.

Hold them up. How many did you have?

Now set that piece of paper aside and take out the other one. On this paper, I want you to list out the things that you are not good at. What you do not have a talent for. Go ahead and do that now. (wait.....)

Count how many items are on your list.

Hold them up. How many did you have?

Hmmm... Interesting. Do you notice anything? What do you think God sees?

So that leads us to Zacchaeus. According to the world's standards for evaluating worth, Zacchaeus was a failure. He was extremely short; he was disliked by everyone because he was a tax collector; and he hated himself.

He was not proud of his life's achievements because he knew he had cheated people to get where he was. He was powerful and had a lot of money -- but he had no friends and was incredibly lonely.

But one day Zacchaeus' life was completely changed because Jesus walked by and he realized how much he mattered to God.

When Zacchaeus learned that Jesus was coming to town, he wanted to see him, but he was too short to get a glimpse above the crowd. So he ran to a spot where he knew Jesus would pass by and he climbed a tree.

Luke 19 records that when Jesus passed this spot, he looked up and noticed Zacchaeus. Can you imagine how Zacchaeus' heart started pounding at that moment? Jesus was looking at him – this small, despised, insignificant man.

Why did Jesus stop at that tree and look at him? Because he knew that's exactly where Zacchaeus was.

God knows exactly where you are too. He knew where you were an hour ago and he knows where you will be tomorrow. You may feel like you're up a tree right now in your life. God knows where you are. You may feel like you're out on a limb; Jesus knows. You may feel all alone, but Jesus stops and notices. You are not forgotten; you are not alone.

Rick Warren writes, "No tear has ever been hidden from him. No hurtful word said to you has ever passed that he missed. No abuse has ever occurred that he didn't see and grieve with you. He sees it all.

"God never overlooks a single sparrow. And he pays even greater attention to you, down to the last detail – even numbering the hairs on your head!" (Luke 12:6-7 MSG).

God SAW Zacchaeus. He knew everything about Zacchaeus. And yet God sought out the flawed Zacchaeus.

So what does God see in you? What does God see when he looks at you? Look at your two lists. God doesn't just see the things you're bad at... no, he sees and concentrates on the sheet of items that you are good at. In fact, his list for you would be MUCH longer!

So look at your sheet of items that you are bad at. As I said, God doesn't focus on these... God doesn't cultivate the bad... no, God ignores these, and so should you. So now I want you to take your sheet of what you're bad at and rip them up! That's right, rip them up! Get rid of them! Forget about this list.

Instead, I want you to focus on the remaining list. This is the list of things that you are good at, that you are passionate about, that fuel you. This is where God can truly utilize you for good... here at church, at home, and at your places of work.

You are uniquely talented. No matter what you think... if you think you have no talents... if you are hard on yourself... if you think that God has no use for you. You have talents. Talents and gifts given to you by God. He only asks that you use them to build up the body of Christ... to use them for the glory of God.

Remember, the greatest gift of love anyone can ever receive is attention. When you give people your time, you give them your life. When you pay attention to someone and look them in the eye, you are saying, "You matter to me. You are valuable."

There is never a moment, never a second in your life that God is not paying attention to you. He notices you 24 hours a day because he loves you; you are valuable to him. So if you are valuable to God, you I hope you see the value in yourself. You are valuable... you are talented... you are loved... you are a child of God. Amen.