

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 30, 2022

Reflection by Sister Pat Coughlin, OSB

Wis 11:22-12:2; 2 Thes 1:11-2:2; Lk 19:1-10

Today we have another Lukan story about a tax collector, a story about being lost and found, a story about salvation, and another story about those who accumulate riches at the expense of the poor. It is also a story about joy and delight.

The central figure in this particular Lukan story is Zacchaeus. His name means “pure.” He is short of stature and, perhaps, comes to this encounter with Jesus small in spirit.

The town of Jericho is the last stop on Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem where he will face suffering and death. Alice MacKenzie has noted that Jesus always seems to be passing by at just the right time to find someone suffering. A man is tormented by demons, a centurion’s servant is deathly ill, a woman’s daughter is beset with a demon, A woman has an issue of blood which renders her impure, a blind man cries out for sight.

Zacchaeus is looking for better vision. Maybe he longs for something more than money to nourish his life, his spirit. Like the father of the Prodigal Son who forsook his dignity by running to his son, his desire to see Jesus leads him to forsake his dignity and climb up a Sycamore tree. Of course, In the eyes of the people of Jericho he has no dignity. They despise him, look down on him, because tax collectors work for the Roman oppressors and shake down the poor of his own people.

Marcus Borg says that Judaism in Jesus' time had a "Purity System" According to that system Zacchaeus was probably not pure. The system excluded people by occupation- like tax collectors and shepherds. The maimed, the chronically ill, lepers, eunuchs, the very poor, menstruating women. Women who had recently given birth had to go to the temple to be purified. People who were very short might be excluded. Luke's Jesus challenged the system many times.

And there is Jesus under the tree looking **up** at Zacchaeus with a face full of love and compassion. He urges Zacchaeus to hurry down and Zacchaeus does so with delight.

Then Jesus declares, "Today salvation has come to this house." Salvation doesn't happen in an instant. It's a process that takes a lifetime of the healing and reconciliation needed to see and follow Jesus who reached out to those who have been declared out of bounds by so many systems of domination in our culture.

Jesus invites himself to Zaccheus' the taxpayer's house. I like to think that he explains salvation to him over a long dinner.