

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY Lord, when the day of wrath comes we have no hope except in your grace. Make us so to watch for the last days that the consummation of our hope may be the joy of the marriage feast of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE GOSPEL LESSON **Luke 19:1-10**

(Jesus reaches out with mercy to Zacchaeus, a tax collector. Zacchaeus responds with repentance and faith .)

1 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. 3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. 5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him,

"Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."

6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. **7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'"**

8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! **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.**"

9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. **10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.**"

INTRO - Yesterday, the sporting world saw another surprising upset. Illinois has been a losing football team for decades. They were playing AT Ohio State, a perennial national power, and ranked # 1. Former coach and commentator Lou Holtz said, 'There's no way Illinois is going to beat Ohio State.' So, Illinois only won, 28-21. They turned the tables on the conventional wisdom of the experts.

I. In the life of Zacchaeus, the conventional wisdom of the people of his day was proven wrong, not just once, but twice in today's lesson.

A. Listen to the people of Jericho. Verse 7 says, **All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'"**

1. They were surprised at Jesus, 'Imagine this prophet spending time with a sinner like this.

2. They were more surprised that the sinner was Zacchaeus.

A. Zacchaeus was a tax collector. Tax collectors took taxes from their own people and then gave them to the occupying Roman government. Tax collectors were considered traitors,

B. And, the way that tax collectors made money was by collecting more than the government wanted, and keeping the rest for themselves. Tax collectors were therefore thought to be thieves.

3. And Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector in the major town of Jericho.

B. But guess what. Zacchaeus was more surprised by Jesus than the people were.

1. He did not know Jesus. He had not spoken to or made a request of Jesus.
2. Yet Jesus not only noticed Zacchaeus, and spoke to the little man in the tree, but he told Zacchaeus that he, Jesus, the prophet, was going to Zacchaeus' house.
3. That meant acceptance, care, forgiveness, all of which Zacchaeus did not receive from the people, and did not expect from Jesus. If anyone was surprised, it was Zacchaeus.

C. Zacchaeus turned the tables a second time. Because he was a tax collector, the people just knew he was a thief and a traitor, even if he wasn't.

1. So what did this 'cheater' do? This wealthy man who had been considered a cheater and thief, now lavishly gives.
2. He doesn't just give to those he may have cheated, saying, **if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."**
3. He gives freely to the needy, **Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor**
4. But this man who is considered a thief turns the tables, and acts totally differently.

II. There was a reason the sports experts thought Ohio State would win yesterday. Illinois had not beaten an number 1 ranked team since 1956!. Their wisdom was based on experience. The people knew what they thought about Zacchaeus *from experience*. So, Why the change in Zacchaeus?

A. The difference was made by Jesus.

1. Jesus, the Messiah, the prophet, the Son of God, did not come to gather the holy people. Really there is no one sinless and holy in God's sight.
2. Jesus, the Messiah, the prophet, the Son of God says, **10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."**
3. Now that is turning the tables!

B. That lavish grace of Jesus, led to Zacchaeus lavish generosity, and committed discipleship.

1. The former cheater is admitting his faults and repaying.
2. The selfish man returns the love of God in generosity!

III. My friends, the same lavish grace of God has shown in our lives. On Friday night we had a class on stress. One of the topics of discussion was that people often expect, not the good, but the bad. We're all used to hard times.

A. In fact, we not only know the pain of life.

1. If we are honest, we are like Zacchaeus in that we know, only too well, our weakness, our failure, our sin.
2. Who expects good for failure, love for sin? Certainly not Zacchaeus. Not us.
3. We may expect rejection, like Zacchaeus, or punishment, or trouble, but not good!

B. The Almighty Lord, the King of the Universe, however, loves people, even sinners, even us, and sent His Son to this world.

1. WE hear it so often we take it for granted.

2. But this surprise of Jesus, changed Zaccheus' life, and it changes ours.
 3. Jesus, the Son of God, the Lord of life, the King of righteousness, died for my sins, and rose again. That should be, and is a surprise!
- C. A disciple, a child of God who is surprised by the love of God, will act in surprising ways themselves.
1. They will admit their sins, and give to the poor.
 2. They will love their enemies and act with generosity.
 3. They will act with faith, trusting God's Word instead of their wisdom.
 4. God's surprised people act in ways that surprise others.

CONCLUSION - A well known quote of St. Francis says, 'Preach the Gospel, if necessary, use words.' In other words, a person's life is the best witness.

A little girl, on the way home from church, turned to her mother and said, "Mommy, the pastor's sermon this morning confused me." The mother said, "Oh! Why is that?" The girl replied, "Well, he said that God is bigger than we are. Is that true?" "Yes, that's true," the mother replied. "He also said that God lives within us. Is that true, too?" Again the mother replied, "Yes." "Well," said the girl. "if God is bigger than us and He lives in us, wouldn't He show through?" That's what happened to Zacchaeus, the surprising love of Jesus showed through. When we know the surprising love of Jesus, our discipleship, our faith, our love will surprise others.