

March 4, 2018
Sermon #16
Life-giving Table

Luke 5:27-32

²⁷ Afterward, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at a kiosk for collecting taxes. Jesus said to him, "Follow me."

²⁸ Levi got up, left everything behind, and followed him. ²⁹ Then Levi threw a great banquet for Jesus in his home. A large number of tax collectors and others sat down to eat with them. ³⁰ The Pharisees and their legal experts grumbled against his disciples. They said, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

³¹ Jesus answered, "Healthy people don't need a doctor, but sick people do. ³² I didn't come to call righteous people but sinners to change their hearts and lives."

Luke 19:1-9

¹ Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through town. ² A man there named Zacchaeus, a ruler among tax collectors, was rich. ³ He was trying to see who Jesus was, but, being a short man, he couldn't because of the crowd. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed up a sycamore tree so he could see Jesus, who was about to pass that way. ⁵ When Jesus came to that spot, he looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, come down at once. I must stay in your home today." ⁶ So Zacchaeus came down at once, happy to welcome Jesus.

⁷ Everyone who saw this grumbled, saying, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

⁸ Zacchaeus stopped and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anyone, I repay them four times as much."

⁹ Jesus said to him, "Today, salvation has come to this household because he too is a son of Abraham."

Life-giving Table

Today is the third Sunday of Lent. The two stories we read today are again about Jesus, Jesus at people's homes and eating. Sometimes I think Jesus just loved people and the food. Or, perhaps, it was to teach us some big truth around the table.

How is your soul? How is your life in God? Have you gathered around the table? Have you eaten last week? Did you give food, the true bread of Life, to your soul?

Francis of Assisi

Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) kept a pouch of ashes on his belt to sprinkle on his food in case it started tasting too good. I think it is amusing. In our days I think it would be better if we would bring God and people around the table. This would be a change of life for those who invite and those who come.

"When Jesus is at the table, the best thing on the table is not something you can finger, fork, or stick into. The best thing on the table is the presence of God" (L. Sweet).

Thanksgiving Picture

Have you seen this picture?

My grandfather received this picture from a UM missionary pastor when he needed to flee to Germany because of the war. My grandfather was a leader and the organ player in the Methodist church and the German pastor left him the picture and the organ when the church was forced to be closed. So this picture is called "Thanksgiving". Jesus just enters into this family during their meal. Let's all continue to pray that eating is not only feeding our bodies but feeding our souls. How is that possible?

In today's Scripture reading both stories are similar. Both come from Luke.

Let us first look at the story of Zacchaeus. He was a ruler among tax collectors and he was rich.

Who are the most not wanted people today

A tax collector was a person who signed a contract with the Roman government to collect the taxes. The tax collector was allowed to collect as much as he wanted. All the extra he collected was his to keep. Not only was he viewed as traitor for making agreements with the enemy but he was also cheating his own people.

Do you know expression "sold down the river". I did not. So my father in law wrote me that in the 1800's there was a very large slave market in St. Louis. The slaves would be sold to plantation owners down the Mississippi River. From that we get the expression sold down the river. What would you think about a person who sold his own people down the river to make a buck?

We have a saying in Lithuania, if you are most happy when your neighbor house is on fire... you are not right in your soul.

Tax collectors were viewed as low-life people. As I think of our world today, who are the most not wanted people today? Who would be the sinners that I do not want to be around? Who would I not invite to eat at my home? Answer that question to yourself. Zacchaeus was one of those who would you least likely to be invited.

Was the ruler of tax collectors happy? I would suggest not. Think of this picture.

{slide}:

A short man, who is not a young boy, not a spring chicken, who has a job, well known in his town. He wanted to see Jesus. No, he was determined to see Jesus. He heard about him. He wanted to see Him. He wanted to see him so much that he did not care anything what the people will think about him. He had just one goal in mind to see Jesus. I just can see him climbing in a tree. I do not think that normally a person who is 40- 50 years old would be climbing in a tree. What would make you to climb a tree?

Better to ask: how much do you want to see Jesus? How far out of your normal routine would go to see Jesus?

Reading this story I see a few things: First, you have to know for yourself that you are a sinner. I think most of us has no problem admitting this. Some of us like to stay there. Well, I am a sinner. Who is not? I am not that bad of a sinner. God still loves me. What kind of story it would be if Zacchaeus would not have wanted to change? What if his did not want to have a different life? The story would end at the very beginning.

Zaccheus knew he was a sinner. He did not want to stay in his state. He was ready to do whatever it takes to see Jesus.

Once you have met Jesus, your life will never stay the same.

It is my conviction that once you have met Jesus, your life will never stay the same. Big changes come with Jesus.

When Jesus came to the spot, where tax ruler was, he looked up and said. (Let me do the real translation :) this is what Jesus said: "Zacchaeus, get down at once; today I must definitely come to your house." A more elaborate paraphrase: "Zacchaeus, get down from there and face your own low-life and know yourself for what you truly are. And today I will enter your luxurious and secured home just as you have invaded and plundered the poor houses of these people." Indeed, it was not an invitation. It was command. It is an imperative, a demand, even a threat. I imagine the same tone as when I scolding my child for being stupid and not listening and embarrassing me in front of all other people.

"I stand at the door and knock"

Jesus wants to go into his house. Remember what we have learned in the past few weeks. From the Book of Revelation: I stand at the door and knock. If you open I will come in and eat. Jesus went into the sinner's home to eat. He ate with sinners.



Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors.

The people of The United Methodist Church™

The UMC church has a logo: Open doors, open heart and open minds. When they say open hearts, do you think it only applies when you are in church? Open minds:

only in church? You would agree, that it is not only in church. So why, when we say open doors, we think only about the church??? open doors mean open house too. Jesus loves to come into our homes and loves to eat with the sinners. This was where the church started and maybe we should try it again. Jesus did go into people homes. Is this the only example in the Bible? No.

Levi & Co. sat down to eat with Jesus

In chapter 5 Jesus went out and saw a tax collector named Levi. Levi threw a great banquet for Jesus in his home. In HIS HOME! A large number of tax collectors and others sat down (Remember? SAT DOWN) What did Jesus commanded to the five thousand people before He performed the miracle? Sit down. Yes. Sit down around the people. Around the sinners.

Matthew

Only two stories in the Bible? How about Matthew 9:10? "As Jesus continued on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at a kiosk for collecting taxes. He said to him, "Follow me," and he got up and followed him. ¹⁰ As Jesus **sat down to eat** in Matthew's house, **many tax collectors and sinners** joined Jesus and his disciples at the table."

How about Mary and Martha? Peter? Lydia? and the list does not end here. Where does the teaching discipleship happen?

When Jesus went to Zacchaeus' house, people around who saw it did not like it at all. I have a question: Which is easier: to mock Jesus for hanging out with sinners, or to get up when he calls and trust that even you have a place at the table?

(slide)

We can choose. Even today we can choose. We can say, "I will not do it" and have many good reasons not to. Alternatively, you will hear the Spirit encouraging you to follow Jesus. The life of a follower Jesus is not easy. Jesus did not have an easy life. We are called to experience different kind of peace, joy and blessing, that comes from the Lord and not from our circumstances.

In verse 8 Zacchaeus stopped and said to Jesus: "Look Lord, I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone, I repay them four times as much". I like CEB translation.

In many other translation it is written I will repay, I will give. But if you look in Greek, it is written in a present tense, not future. He is doing it. It is happening now. Notice, that Jesus did not say anything to Him. Jesus just came into his house. His presence, his willingness to be there and to change the lives of those who feel the need

are that is required. He comes into sinners home for one reason, to bring salvation. Jesus sits at the table. The tax ruler stops whatever he was doing and, not only confesses the sins, but brings reconciliation.

Jesus' answer: Today, salvation has come to this household. Salvation was not promised to Zacchaeus in heaven. It was given in the very gesture of his act of vulnerability.

Obstacles Zacchaeus overcame

There are some obstacles that might have prevented Zacchaeus from meeting Jesus:

1. His being comfortable with a sinful life
2. The Crowd preventing him from doing whatever takes to see Jesus
3. His Condition: not feeling worthy and not listening to Jesus commandment to go to his home.

What saved Zacchaeus?

1. Faith in what Jesus can do in his life.
2. Responding to Jesus command and having Jesus in his home
3. He repaid everyone he had cheated.

Mistakes of the Pharisees

The Pharisees made two mistakes. First, they became filled with pride, thinking that they were right in everything and everyone else was wrong. This is a direct obstacle to Spiritual growth. Secondly, they studied the law in such fine detail, that they often became lost in the detail, forgetting the main purpose of the law; namely love and relationship.

In the story of Levi and in the story of Zacchaeus we have two very similar answers from Jesus: I came to seek and save the lost. I didn't come to call the righteous people but sinners to change their hearts and lives.

This Lent as we are talking about the table, life giving table and we look at Jesus, seeking Jesus, seeking to be true followers, are we willing to apply these stories to our lives? To believe means to follow. Would you invite the sinner at your table? Would you be comfortable to eat with those who do not bring comfort to you? Jesus chose to eat with sinners.