

Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
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John Crosby
Zacchaeus | Luke 19:1-28

Knock, Knock! Who's there? *Xavier*. Xavier who?
Xavier breath and open the door!

Knock, Knock! Who's there? *Hatch*. Hatch who?
Bless you. Cover your mouth next time.

Knock, Knock! Who's there? *A little old lady*. A little old lady who?
I didn't know you could yodel.

Last one, I have one more, but literally I'm outside after the 9:30AM service and this little kid comes up to me and goes, "Knock, Knock." It's the only thing the kid heard the whole time and the mom said, "All during the service he was going 'Knock, knock. Knock, knock.'" Last one . . .

Knock, Knock! Who's there? *Thermos*. Thermos who?
Thermos be a better knock-knock joke than this one.

Kids can do that for hours and hours, long after you want to just stop the car and open the door. And what's behind that, of course, is this idea that we want to know who's on the other side of the door. We want to know who it is. We want to know who it really is and we're in a series here as we go toward Easter, where Jesus is saying to people, not *knock, knock*, but *who do people say that I am? Who's on the other side of the door here? Who is Jesus really and who does Jesus think that I am?* That knock, knock is for kids. When you get to be an adult, same story...different thing.

You hear classics. You probably had to read Homer, *The Iliad and The Odyssey*, in school. One of the great tales. He writes *The Iliad* first to remind us that all of life is a battle—the Trojan War. And then he writes *The Odyssey* to say all of life is a journey to find your way back home. *The Iliad and The Odyssey*. You remember the story . . . as a young man, the Greek king Ulysses is called to the Trojan War. He leaves his kingdom of Ithaca, and he promises his wife, Penelope, and his baby son, Telemachus, and his friends, and his dog, and everybody, that he would be right back. But the war is ten years long and the journey home is treacherous. The Fates decreed that it would be 20 years before Ulysses finally gets back to Ithaca. And shortly before he gets back to Ithaca to free his wife and son, he has heard that there are people trying to take over the kingdom and force his wife to marry them. Shortly before he gets home, Athena, the Greek goddess, disguises him as a beggar and he goes to his home. He's not recognized by his baby son (no surprise), by his wife (no surprise), or by his best friend. Nobody recognized him and he sees how bad it is. The story goes on that when he finally gets to his villa, his home, he's all alone. Ulysses comes upon a white dog, weak

with age, whom he recognizes as his beloved puppy, Argus. Despite twenty years and his master's disguise, Argus immediately recognizes Ulysses. When the dog hears Ulysses' voice, he weakly lifts his head, cocks his ears and struggles to rise. Ulysses bends down to cradle the only one who recognizes him in his hands. "My dear Argus," he whispers with tears in his eyes, and the faithful dog, his last wish rewarded, dies in Ulysses arms. The dog didn't need to go knock, knock because he recognized his master's voice.

Now I have to tell you, I think there are all kinds of reasons in life not to recognize who's right in front of us: not to recognize God, not to recognize who's most important, but I will tell you that I think in the end, we come to know what we love the most. Let me say that again—we come to know what we love the most because love changes our eyes. That's what's happening in the story of Jesus that Luke tells. The part of the story that we're going to look at today takes place a week before Holy Week as Jesus is walking to Jerusalem. When He is about six miles away, he comes to Jericho, one of the most ancient cities in the world. As He approaches the city, He hears a blind man yelling out from the side of the road saying, "Hey, hey, is that Jesus? Hey, is that Jesus?" And instead of being shut up, he yells even louder. Jesus goes over and heals the man and the crowds go wild. It says they all applauded and everyone praised God. This is what happens next to the real popular guy. From Luke 19:

¹Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ²A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was the chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd.

That's why kids love this story; they're short too. They often feel like they're left out. They're straining to get in, trying to understand what the jokes are all about, hearing about this Jesus stuff. They're straining to see. They love this story.

⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. ⁵When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."

[Luke 19:1-4]

It would be like stopping the parade and seeing Ebenezer Scrooge or Don Corleone, the Godfather, or El Chapo, the drug dealer, up in a tree and not going *got Him*, but instead saying, "Hey, come on down, let's have a bite to eat. I must eat with you today. You are Infamous, and powerful, and feared, and despised. I must eat with you today."

It's an odd phrase: I must do this. It's the same thing that Jesus says in John 4 when it says Jesus must go through Samaria (he really didn't have to). Usually they walk through Samaria because that's where all the bad people are. It says Jesus must go *to* Samaria and see the woman at the well. It's not about geography and it's certainly not about customs; it's about His mission. And here's the part of the story that adults like. Kids like climbing into the tree. What adults love about the story of Zacchaeus is there is this yearning to see who Jesus really might be. A sense that there's something—whether I'm wealthy or broke—there's something that is incomplete in my life, and could this Jesus help? But adults, unlike kids, want to stay up in the tree. They want to stay a

safe distance away. It's not until Jesus stops and says *hey*, not *hey you*, but, *Zacchaeus, come on down*.

So Zacchaeus came down at once and welcomed Jesus gladly. The crowd saw this, the people saw this, and EVERYONE began to mutter or murmur, "He has gone to be the guest of that sinner." This is the only time in the story of Jesus, all the stories of Jesus, the only time where He disappoints everybody. Sometimes He disappoints the disciples, sometimes He disappoints the crowds, sometimes He disappoints the Pharisees, but this time *everybody* is grumbling. They're going, "Him? Jesus, don't You have any idea who that is? Don't You have any class at all? What are You spending time with him for?" The story of Zacchaeus is a reminder that God has no class at all. Aren't you glad?

It says Zacchaeus stood up and said to Jesus, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody, I will pay back four times the amount." And Jesus said to him, not to the crowd, but to Zacchaeus first, "Today salvation has come into this house." What a great phrase! Salvation has walked into your house. Salvation has come into the house because Jesus has come into the house. And then He turns to the crowd and He says, "This man, too, is a son of Abraham (one of the special ones, one of the beloved ones). That would be like saying, "This man, too, is a beloved child of God. You know him as David Duke. I call him child of God." No wonder everybody is grumbling. And then he ends the story, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." I love that ending: the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. My favorite story in the Bible is probably the prodigal son, which is right before this. The prodigal son is great, but the prodigal son says, "And the boy, a far way off, turned back toward his father and walked home and when his father saw him he ran up to him." This is a better story. This is Jesus saying, *My job is to come and save and seek the lost even if they're up in a tree, even if everybody else hates them*.

Who do you say that I am? Knock, knock. Who's really there? It's Jesus. Each of us wants to know who Jesus really is. Luke tells his story and he weaves together three themes through the whole story of Jesus. Luke says there are three things, three themes, to understanding who is Jesus. They all happen right in this little story.

First, we recognize Jesus in the problem of riches and what to do about it. You will see Jesus more clearly when you deal with money the way that God wants you to deal with money. This is a good story, right? Bad, wealthy guy ends up doing good. It comes right after a bad story. A good, wealthy guy who doesn't do good. You remember that story. A young man who was very wealthy came up to Jesus and says, "I'm in, right? What do I need to do to be saved?" And Jesus says, "You've been so good for so long the only thing you have to do is give up your money and follow Me." And it says the man went away very sad because he was so wealthy. His money had a death grip on his soul. And it says, "Jesus looked at him and loved him." That's a sad story. This is the unexpected story. A bad, rich guy has Jesus stop in front of him and he gives up his money to follow Jesus.

When money starts to talk, it shouts louder. When money starts to talk, it shouts louder than the other voices of honesty, or respect, or dignity. Money can become a siren song. Can you just imagine the reactions of Zacchaeus's neighbors during his career? His neighbors see Zacchaeus get a bigger, bigger, bigger house. They see slaves start to come into the house. They see new clothes all the time. They see these incredible banquets. And all of that wealth is happening with their money. When money starts to talk, it shouts louder.

There's a commentator, a scholar named N.T. Wright, and he says, "When money changes hands, there's always the temptation for someone's hands to get dirty." "When money changes hands, there's always the temptation for someone's hands to get dirty." It could be across a tax collecting table in the first century, it could be across a computer screen. Sometimes it's about what we have, sometimes it's about how we get it, and sometimes it's about what we do with it. And in this story, when Jesus sees Zacchaeus and Zacchaeus sees Jesus, the power of money falls away. That's number one.

Number two, the second theme in the Book of Luke is: if you want to know who Jesus really is, spend more time with the wrong people. You're not going to find Jesus with the good people. Spend more time with the wrong crowd. Jesus identifies with sinners. That's why everybody's upset. Jesus is spending time with sinners and His reputation pays the price. My question is, if you're going to be with Jesus, will your reputation ever pay the price? Will you just know goody-two-shoes people or will you reach out and love people that others don't love? I said at the start that everybody, *everybody*, is complaining in this story. They're all muttering. Where are you in this story? Are you one of the people who is muttering about all those hypocrites outside the church—they've got all the clothes, the cars, the careers, the looks—they don't need God. Are you muttering about them? Or are you here today muttering about all those hypocrites inside the church? They do all the right things and say all the right things, but their faith is about an inch deep. Are you struggling to see who Jesus is, but you're afraid to get too close? Do you feel like you're up a tree? And the reason I say that is because you feel like you're up a tree in the sense that if Jesus stops and the crowd gathers and everybody looks up at you, are you going to feel comfortable with what they see? Or, if they saw the real you, would you be ashamed like your pastor would be ashamed? I would be. You want to know who Jesus really is? Spend some more time with the wrong crowd and be ready when Jesus stops and says, "Hey you, yeah I'm talking to you. Come on down."

The last theme in this story of Luke is this: faith recognizes Jesus because Jesus has already recognized them. Faith recognizes Jesus because Jesus has already recognized their faith and their hunger. The result of recognizing Jesus is you get a new chance at life. Luke says that Zacchaeus is at his house and he jumps up and he says, "Look, Lord." Not *look Jesus*, or *look Rabbi*, but, "Look, Lord, boss, I'm giving it all away. You're more important than all of that. It's a new life." Now, he is not called by Jesus to give everything away, he's just changed. People are changed when they are loved, not when they're guilty, not when they're shamed, not when they're scared. People are changed when they're loved. Zacchaeus receives unexpected love. Is that what you

need today? Unexpected love.

We started with Homer, so let's end with Hemmingway. I love Hemmingway. He writes a short story. Hemmingway writes a story called *The Capital of the World*. And it's a lot about bull fighting like many of his themes are, but this story also features a young man named Paco. Paco fights with his father and runs away from the hills to the big city of Madrid. His father wants him back, and so halfway through the short story, he goes to Madrid and cannot find his son. He puts a want ad in the Madrid newspaper, and the ad says, "Paco, come to the Hotel Montana at noon on Tuesday. All is forgiven. Let's go home." "Paco, come to the Hotel Montana at noon on Tuesday. All is forgiven. Papa. We'll go home." And the story goes that the father walks around the corner of the plaza where the hotel is and the plaza is filled with police pushing back a crowd. There are 800 men in the plaza named Paco, all of whom are wishing that their father would show up and bring them home. All is forgiven.

Zacchaeus, come on down, come on down, we got to go home. You know the important thing in this story, as often is the case, the important thing is the last thing that Jesus says. The last thing that Jesus says here is, "For the Son of man has come to save and to seek the lost." This is the very week before Holy Week and Jesus is looking down the road to Jerusalem; he's almost there. Next week Dee is going to talk about Jesus's entry into the city on Palm Sunday, but today the complaint is that Jesus has gone into the house to spend time with a sinner. Isn't that terrible? But the story is going to change next week. Next week the story will say that Jesus has gone out of the city to die with the thieves on a cross. He will have the same reason for both; to seek and to save the lost.

Zacchaeus throws a feast because Jesus came into his house, but Zacchaeus's table becomes Jesus's table because wherever Jesus is the host, wherever Jesus is in the house, He takes the bread and He breaks it and says, "This is for you, My body broken." And if you're serving great wine, He pours the wine into the cup and says, "This is the blood that will forgive your sins. Whenever you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you proclaim My death for you until I come again." Jesus is passing through and Jesus stops and looks at you says, "Come on down, I have to eat with you today."

Lord Jesus, I thank You that You're still stopping here because there are a lot of days when I feel like Zacchaeus. I'm so glad that other people don't see me the way that You do. They'd turn away. You stop and You love me anyway. I thank You, Lord God, that You stop in front of every one of us and that You know our names and You want us to share a meal with You—a meal that will give us hope, and life, and love to last. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.