

“Grateful Giving”

Luke 19:1-10 & 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12

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What fills you with a sudden burst of joy? When Spencer and Abigail were young it was going as a family to the Toledo Zoo to see Louie the baby elephant and the dazzling Christmas lights. Trees fill me with joy. The first warm spring bike ride. A big bowl of real buttered popcorn, with a side of cookie dough, without the chocolate chips. And yes, I am aware that someday I may get sick from eating raw eggs. Sometimes joy is worth the risks. On the farm, it was letting the cows out into a new pasture. They pranced and danced, would stop, turn, make eye contact, and nod their head up and down. Their joy was contagious.

What has caused you to joyfully drop everything? What would it take for you to suddenly leave work, run, and climb a tree? There is joy in the discovery of grace.

Luke 19:1-10 NLT “Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town. There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich. He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way. When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. “Zacchaeus!” he said. “Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today.” Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. But the people were displeased. “He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner,” they grumbled. Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, “I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!” Jesus responded, “Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.”

Zacchaeus heard of God’s grace made tangible through Jesus. Jesus has compassion for everyone. Jesus forgives everyone. Jesus welcomes everyone into community. Jesus abundantly blesses everyone. Zacchaeus knew he made plenty of mistakes. Zacchaeus knew he was despised. Everywhere he went people scoffed, glared, and whispered about him. But Zacchaeus heard of Jesus who loves everyone. The moment he heard Jesus was near he had to see Jesus, grace in the flesh. In those days, an adult running and climbing a tree was undignified. Zacchaeus sensed that Jesus would not judge him for that nor anything. The excitement of seeing Jesus filled Zacchaeus with joy to run and climb a tree. His joy went off the charts when Jesus called him by name and said, “I must be a guest in your house today.” His joy was millions of times greater than the combined joy of gopher fans storming the field after their win over Penn State. Experiencing God’s grace was grandeur than a parade of prancing, baby elephants, carrying popcorn and cookie dough by one’s side as you ride bike through a forest dazzling with lights.

Life is tough, full of ups and downs, twists and turns yet God’s grace is always reforming us. God’s grace is the source of joy. Find ways every week to enjoy God’s grace, savor grace and share grace.

For Zacchaeus he decided to share God’s grace by generously giving. We serve out of gratitude. We are inspired to joyful give as we savor God’s grace for us. God’s grace inspires our creativity, our passion, our compassion. Enjoying God’s grace enables us to grow in love. The apostle Paul wrote. **2 Thessalonians 1: Select Verses MSG**

“Our God gives you everything you need, makes you everything you are to be. You need to know, friends, that thanking God over and over for you is not only a pleasure; it’s a must. We have to do it. Your faith is growing phenomenally; your love for each other is developing wonderfully. Why, it’s only right that we give thanks. We’re so proud of you; you’re so steady and determined in your faith despite all the hard times that have come down on you. We tell everyone we meet in the churches all about you. Grace is behind and through all of this, our God giving Godself freely, the Master, Jesus Christ, giving himself freely.”

Our joy, love, and generosity all flow from God’s grace. Pastor Joseph Wallace-Williams said. “When we are kind, we are acting according to our nature; when we are unkind, we are acting contrary to what we were created to be. Relating positively to others is a concrete expression of the truth that we share the same human

nature; we belong together. In a sense, we can never go wrong by treating others extravagantly well; it shows that we have learned something from the magnanimity of God. To the extent that we have experienced God's unconditional love for us, we will more readily become kind and loving to those around us. We will become more like what we were created to be."

Luke contrasts Zacchaeus with a person that lived a life devoid of grace. He sought to earn God's love. He was a legalist. He believed others need to earn their own money, others need to follow the law. Because he rejected grace, he was exceedingly sorrowful.

Luke 18:18-27 "Once a religious leader asked Jesus this question: "Good Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked him. "Only God is truly good. But to answer your question, you know the commandments: 'You must not commit adultery. You must not murder. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. Honor your father and mother.'" The man replied, "I've obeyed all these commandments since I was young." When Jesus heard his answer, he said, "There is still one thing you haven't done. Sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." But when the man heard this he became very sad, for he was very rich. When Jesus saw this, he said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God! In fact, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!" Those who heard this said, "Then who in the world can be saved?" Jesus replied, "What is impossible for people is possible with God."

It is impossible to buy your way into heaven and impossible to buy joy. It is impossible to get into heaven by good works. Good works without compassion is devoid of joy. Giving without love is hollow. No matter what we do or who we are it is impossible to save ourselves. God graciously, freely saves us. When we realize we are saved by grace, we are set free to abundant, joyful, loving life. For most the desire to somehow earn at least a portion of our salvation keeps coming back to us, urges to justify our behavior, temptations to compare our self to others. We constantly need God's grace to continuing forgive, heal, reform, and revitalize us. We constantly need God's grace to fill us with joy. Be still, know God, know God's love for you and everyone, know God's grace that is redeeming all.

Jesus told Zacchaeus, "Today salvation has come to this house because Zacchaeus too is son of Abraham." Salvation is Jesus. Salvation is the Messiah, God's grace personified. Luke has been building on the theme of God's grace throughout his gospel. Luke is hoping we will experience God's grace as we cherish the parables of the found sheep, found coin, the prodigal son. Luke is declaring that God's salvation is for all. Luke's gospel is full of accounts of people who experienced God's grace, savored grace, became joyful then served and gave out of gratitude.

Zacchaeus being declared a son of Abraham indicated that he was a part of God's plan of salvation. Neither profession, nor wealth, nor anything precludes anyone from redemption. Zacchaeus, all people are children of God, who belong to God's eternal loving family. Jesus came to save the lost. Everyone is lost. The tragedy is some think they can find the way by their own efforts resulting in a miserable earthly life. Jesus is the way. Jesus is salvation. Jesus is grace. Jesus came so you can experience God's grace and be filled with joy. God's grace is relentless in making you whole. Grace enables humanity to flourish.

On earth there are displeased grumps. People who reject God's grace and refuse to be gracious. When you find yourself criticized, unappreciated and judged by displeased grumps remember Jesus regularly received this type of treatment. Jesus was undeterred. He remained joyful and continued to spread joy. God is always delighting in you. You are God's beloved, cherished child. When you are down, enjoy something that gives you joy. Ponder God's grace that is lifting you up and making you glorious. Perhaps be a little like Zacchaeus undeterred by displeased grumps to run, climb a tree, eat a meal with friends and celebrate God's grace. Amen