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Speaker: Paul McIlwraith, Teaching Pastor
Scripture: Luke 19:1-10, Zacchaeus

When I was a child between the ages of about 5-12, my parents established a routine in our summer vacation schedules. We spent most of the summer camping at Chesley Lake, located near Sauble Beach. I have so many wonderful memories of my childhood spent at Chesley Lake. I learned to golf there. I drove a mini bike for the first time there. I had my first girlfriend at Chesley Lake. Young love. Probably the most significant thing that happened to me there was that I accepted Jesus as my Saviour one evening at a chapel when I was 11. So many wonderful memories.

But here is the thing. Chesley Lake was a great place to vacation but it took us two hours to get there. Two hours one way. For a child of 6,7,8, that is a long time in a car. Now let me show my age a little bit here. That was in an era where there was no air conditioning in the car. You had to wind down the window yourself, to get a cool breeze. There was no elaborate “infotainment” systems like we have in cars today. No, if you were lucky dad popped in an eight track cassette and you listened to the “Grand Ole Opry” or the “Gauthier Brothers”!

Two hours with my sisters in the back seat trying not to encroach on each other’s personal space, man that was a long trip. I have a confession. I am a destination guy. If I am travelling somewhere, I usually see the journey as the necessary evil, until I reach my destination. Is there anyone else like that? Just get me there.

The more I have pondered our past family vacations to Chesley Lake however, the more I remembered the journey to get there. The small towns and landmarks that marked our way. The distinct smell of rendering plant in Rothsay meant we were 1/3 of the way there. French fries at the Four Aces restaurant in Clifford always marked the halfway point.

The Hanover water tower was 2/3’s of the way and the gas station at the corner in Allenford meant we were almost there.

The journey. Although it often seemed like a long drive and there were moments that I wished I could just zap myself from our home to Chesley Lake instantaneously, I have a lot of memories of the journey. I would have missed out on a lot without it. How about you? Can you reflect on some of the journeys of your life?

Carolyn and I have tried hard to create moments of memories and learnings in our journeys even today with our children. To teach them that life is not just about the defining moments or the destinations such as passing a grade in school or graduating from university, moving up a level in music or accomplishments in sports. It is as much to do with how you got there. The life lessons or blood, sweat and tears that were shed along the way.

Read through the gospels in the bible and you will notice something very quickly. Jesus was always going somewhere. His life and ministry were a series of journeys and here is the point. The moving about was part of the purpose of his life. Jesus made the most of not just the destination, not just the defining moments but of the journey to get there. Jesus used them to do as much teaching as he did when he actually stood before people in a temple or on the side of a mountain. In fact, with the exception of the Sermon on the Mount, most of Jesus’ teachings were in response to an interruption.

As he travelled throughout the countryside, someone pulling at his tunic, asking a question or an encounter with someone on the road. Jesus used them as teachable moments.

We are in the midst of a message series at North Park that we have entitled, *On The Way*. In this series, we are going to go back and forth between Jesus' teachings in the gospels that were a little more intentional and those that appeared to be more spontaneous. One of the goals of this series is to be more perceptive to the teachable moments Jesus has for us in our journey of life, *On The Way*, every day. Did you have any of those moments with Jesus this week?

Today we come to what appears to be one of those more spontaneous, *On The Way* teachings of Jesus. It is found in the gospel of Luke 19. If you have your bibles, I invite you to turn there with me. Notice again, how this passage begins.

Luke 19:1
Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town.

The NIV translation states that, Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. He was passing through. Which meant Jesus did not intend to stay in Jericho. He was on his way somewhere else. Jericho was not his final destination. In fact, if you read some of the passages in Luke leading up to this point, you will notice that Jesus was travelling throughout the countryside, preaching and teaching and he had just healed a blind beggar on the outskirts of Jericho. He has gathered a bit of a crowd around him but now he is headed for Jerusalem where just a short time later, he would be crucified on a cross. That is his final destination. Jericho was simply, on the way.

You notice if you read the text that Jesus doesn't gather his disciples around him and say, okay guys, let's just get through Jericho. Keep the people back, I have given enough of my time and energy to them. Now I have to focus on what's ahead of me. No.

This is important for us to understand. Jesus' mission on earth was not just to suffer and die but to seek and to save those who were lost. Those who were separated from him. Most of those rescue moments happened on the way, in the gospels.

So the text says Jesus was making his way through town and in *Luke 19:2*, it states,

There was a man there named Zacchaeus.

Maybe you have heard of him. If you are of my generation, you'll know that Zacchaeus was a popular Children's Sunday School character and his story would often be told with the aid of a flannel board. Anyone remember that? As the passage goes on we find out two very important details about Zacchaeus.

The first important detail was that he was a tax collector, but not just any old tax collector. Look at Luke 19:2. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich. Let me remind you of what a tax collector was in Jesus' day. Remember the land was ruled by the Romans.

Tax Collectors were seen as traitors by their fellow Jews because they collected taxes for the Romans and often overcharged their own people so they could skim a little "off the top" for themselves. As a result, they were despised and seen as among the worst of sinners. They would have been banned from worshipping in the synagogue with their fellow Jews and generally ostracized from the community. A Chief tax collector was even more despicable because they got a cut of all the other tax collectors' earnings. Jericho was a major tax collection site because it was the gateway into the Roman controlled territory which is likely why Zacchaeus was so wealthy. The people would have despised him. Much like our culture today.

Hey there is an election coming up. Taxes are in the news. There is something about the person that collects our taxes that causes such animosity isn't there?

So, Zacchaeus is a tax collector, a chief tax collector who would have been hated by his own people. That is important point number one.

The second thing we learn about Zacchaeus from the text is that he was short. Luke 19:3 says, He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. Zacchaeus was a wee little man and a wee little man was he. Do you remember the song? He was vertically challenged. Now again, in Jesus day, the prevailing mindset was that there was a reason for someone being short besides just genetics. Short people were stereotyped as being small minded, greedy and the reason they were short was because there was some lingering sin in their family.

These two details about Zacchaeus that the text reveals, he is a tax collector and he is short would have made him an outsider in Jericho. He was on the margins, despised and rejected. He was seen as the worst of sinners. But all throughout the gospels, we see that Jesus has a special calling to those on the margins of society. Those who were considered down and out and despised by others. Those whose lives counted as nothing, or less than nothing. In short, Jesus came to earth for people just like Zacchaeus. This sets us up for a unique encounter between these two men.

Zacchaeus had no doubt heard about Jesus by this time and when he sees the crowds beginning to gather as Jesus and his entourage are passing through town, he clamors to get a look. We all do it though, don't we? We want to see when things are going on around us. We check our social media feeds regularly just to see what we may have missed. Our culture has even coined the term, FOMO, Fear Of Missing Out, to describe that experience. FOMO is anxiety that an exciting or interesting event may currently be happening and you are absent from it.

I might suggest that a good chunk of the 25 000 students that gathered on Broughdale Ave, last weekend for FOCO (Western's Fake Homecoming) were those suffering from FOMO. They just wanted to be part of the action. They had a fear of missing out.

Human nature is such that when we see a crowd gathering, we want to know what is going on. This may also explain part of the reason for traffic jams at the scene of accidents. Many people slowing down just to take a look.

Zacchaeus is experiencing FOMO in the text, probably fanboying a little bit and he scrambles to get a glimpse of Jesus. Given his status in this society however, no one was willing to step aside and let him move to the front of the crowd. In fact, it is more likely that when people saw him coming, they probably closed ranks and shut him out. No one is going to hoist him on their shoulders to get a better look and so in desperation it says in,

Luke 19:4

he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way.

Why was this a desperate measure? Sycamore trees lined the roads of this day. They were fairly easy to climb. This seems like an easy solution to Zacchaeus's problem. In fact, we see it today at parades and other crowded events, people climb light standards and trees to get a better look. It is a rather ingenious solution. Once again, it is important to know the culture of Jesus's day. For a small, middle aged man like Zacchaeus to be climbing a tree in full view of the public especially as someone like Jesus is approaching would have been shameful. It would have been totally undignified, even for a lowly tax collector. The people now would have been disgusted with Zacchaeus's behavior. They would have been embarrassed for him. They were probably jeering him as he climbed the tree. It made him a laughing stock. They didn't want this type of man interrupting their chance to see Jesus. They were probably frustrated that he even had the nerve to show his face on this occasion. Hadn't Jesus come to save them from people like Zacchaeus?

Zacchaeus doesn't seem to care. Can you imagine? He has such a longing to see Jesus, the one who engages even those in the margins of society that he doesn't care how he looks to others. He doesn't care what people think about him.

Have you ever done that? Been so passionate about something that you didn't care how you looked or what people thought about you?

You may have noticed that hockey season started up again this week and once again, grown men and women, pay \$150 dollars for a jersey of a twenty-two-year old multi-millionaire hockey player. They wear that jersey to the game, paint their face, hold up signs and yell and scream all for the hope of appearing for a brief second on the arena scoreboard. They throw all matters of decorum out the window for the passion of the game. Do you know people like this?

Zacchaeus has such a longing to see Jesus that he doesn't seem to care how he looks or what people think of him. He is already despised by the entire town. He just wants to catch a glimpse of this Jesus, the one he has been hearing about, as he passes by. Put yourself in this scene. Jesus is approaching on the street. The crowd is jostling for a good look, Zacchaeus is up in the tree and he must be thinking. He is coming straight at me. I have the best seat in house. I will just watch him go by. Maybe he will heal someone or say something, or teach a little bit about this Kingdom he has been talking about.

Luke 19:5

When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. "Zacchaeus!" he said.

Jesus did not pass by. He stopped right below Zacchaeus and then even though they had never met, he called him by name. Can you imagine how shocking that must have been to Zacchaeus? He was hoping just to catch a glimpse of Jesus and get a bit of a sense of what all the hype was about and now Jesus has singled him out in front of all the people. He's now the centre of attention. The main character in this unfolding drama.

I used to have a professor at Western that would do this in his class. Just call people out by name to answer a question. See, I was the kind of student that just wanted to blend in. I didn't want any trouble. If I knew the answer to question, maybe I would put my hand up. If my hands not up, don't ask. Am I right?! To have a professor who knew my name and would call on me unexpectedly, Paul! Those were some anxious times. I could not wait to be done with that class.

Now admittedly, Zacchaeus kind of sets himself up to be noticed here. He's up in a tree. It still probably caught him off guard. Zacchaeus, Jesus calls out to him but before he could answer, Jesus continues.

Luke 19:5

Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today.

Jesus stuns the crowd by addressing Zacchaeus by name, the most despised person in all of Jericho. Then he says, I must come to your home! Notice Jesus doesn't single out the local pastor, the mayor

or anyone other respected member of this society. That is who we would expect Jesus would visit with. No, he has a plan to stay with the one guy in this town that no one likes. In fact, he is not asking, he is telling Zacchaeus, *I must be a guest in your home today.*"

So, if you were Zacchaeus, how would you respond? One of the most despised men in all of Jericho, a sinner has just had Jesus invite himself to his home. What an honour.

This is the point we can't miss. With this simple gesture, Jesus has defended the public honour of a man held in contempt by the Jewish community in this town. Jesus once again stood with the one on the margins of society. How would you respond? If Jesus stood with you? Maybe he has.

Zacchaeus? He could not move quick enough.

Luke 19:6

Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy.

There was something about Jesus. All throughout the gospels, we read of stories of people who encountered him and left everything to follow him. Peter, James and John who were fishermen literally drop their nets on the spot, to follow Jesus. Matthew, another tax collector got up and left his booth and his lucrative career the moment Jesus walked by him and said, follow me. All of them overwhelmed by the presence of Jesus. But it is interesting that the crowds around him in Jericho on this day, did not respond with the same enthusiasm. In fact, in,

Luke 19:7 it says,

But the people were displeased. "He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner," they grumbled.

The praises of the crowd when Jesus first appeared have now turned to protests. They grumbled and complained and criticized Jesus for going to the house of a sinner even though that was his mission.

Luke 19:10 reminds us of that,
*For the Son of Man came to seek and save
those who are lost."*

Everyone in that crowd was a sinner just like Zacchaeus. Oh, they may not have been tax collectors but scripture tells us, *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God -Romans 3:23*. Perhaps in their piety they didn't recognize their own need for Jesus because they were too busy judging Zacchaeus!

If I can make a bit of a confession to you today. It was this passage Luke 19:7 that stirred me the most as I was preparing this week. But the people were displeased. "He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner," they grumbled. It occurred to me as I studied this passage that instead of being resentful and displeased, this crowd gathered around Jesus should have been rejoicing, shouldn't they? A sinner, a despised sinner, Zacchaeus has accepted an offer to welcome Jesus into his home. To do life with him. To get to know him more. That should have been cause for celebration in this community. That a man's heart and life now has the potential to be changed because of seeing Jesus and meeting him face to face. Instead the people are resentful.

That is when it hit me. How many times can I be like this crowd? How often can we as Christians be like this crowd gathered before Jesus in Jericho?

Oh, we say our mission is to go into our world and share about the love and hope of Jesus but how often are we guilty of huddling together so that those outside our circle can't get a glimpse of him? How often do we shut people out, people who are genuinely seeking Jesus because of our little cliques or religious hang ups? Even in here. I don't know if you realize it or not but we have people that come in here every week that simply want to see Jesus. They may not have crossed the line of dropping everything to follow him like the disciples or maybe like you or me, but they are genuinely seeking him.

They may not look like you. They may not act like you but is this a place where people are embraced and welcomed on their spiritual journey even if they don't have it all together? Now before you answer too quickly, I want you to understand something. To be a church that truly fulfills the mission that Jesus has called us to the world, to seek and to save the

lost, it may mean that things can get a little messy. Things could get a little uncomfortable. Jesus never backed away from the messy or the uncomfortable. In fact, that is where he did his best work. In the margins of society.

Is this a place where we will do all that we can to enhance people's ability to see Jesus or will we huddle together to block the view of those we deem to be outsiders or those who maybe think or act a little differently from us? And as people make genuine steps to grow in their faith and commitment to Jesus, will we celebrate with them or grumble and complain and do whatever we can to set up roadblocks? I am just asking.

Back to the text.

Although we don't know what happened between Jesus and Zacchaeus after he arrived at the Tax Collector's home, we do see the result of their interaction.

Luke 19:8

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!"

Due to the encounter he has with Jesus, Zacchaeus was changed. Spiritual transformation may look differently for each of us but for this wealthy man it hit him in his pocketbook. He gave half of his money to the poor. He offered to pay back anyone he has cheated, fourfold. Zacchaeus' repentance here isn't just a change of heart. It involves a change in behaviour. It involves restitution and restoration, making amends and Zacchaeus does so lavishly. Real faith acts to make things right again.

It is interesting that just one chapter before the story of Zacchaeus, in Luke 18, a rich, young man approaches Jesus and asks what he needs to do to inherent eternal life. Do you remember what Jesus said to him? Sell everything you have, give to the poor and follow him. But, the rich man could not do it. He loved his money more than the way of Jesus.

Zacchaeus on the other hand, demonstrates his salvation by letting go. Surrendering his trust in his wallet for his trust in Jesus.

Look what Jesus says about Zacchaeus' transformed life.

Luke 19:9-10

Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham.

Then, as if to remind those in the crowd who grumbled against him, Jesus reiterates the call on his life, *For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.* Jesus' mission was not just to suffer and die but to search for and rescue those who are lost without him.

How do you think the crowd around Jesus would have responded when he uttered these words, *Salvation has come to this home today? To Zacchaeus!* We don't really know but past experience with this group would lead us to believe that they weren't really happy about it. They weren't celebrating because Zacchaeus was an outsider, a social leper whom Jesus brings back inside again. Back into the fold.

Zacchaeus' presence amongst them now meant that they had to examine their own hearts. Were they joyful that someone who was lost was now found? Or were they not? If they weren't, why not? Here's the thing, there is no evidence that after Zacchaeus's conversion experience with Jesus that he left his job as a tax collector.

In fact, he probably continued in this despised position although hopefully operating a little more ethically as he was now a tax collector for Jesus! But, would he now be greeted in the streets? Would he be accepted into the worship at the synagogue? As he genuinely sought to follow Jesus would he be permitted to serve in the church even if he still carried some baggage from the past? We all have a little baggage, don't we?

Can I get personal with you for a moment? I was raised in the church. Except for a little teenage rebellion, I have spent most of my life in the church. Although I am thankful for the spiritual heritage I had, I also found that I entered into my twenties with a rather legalistic, narrow mindset of what it meant to be a Christian. I would have been one of those guys in the crowd that grumbled at Jesus when he engaged Zacchaeus.

My life perspective was a little more, black and white. I tended to hang around people that thought like me, looked like me and believed like me. Quite honestly, that was comfortable and that is what I wanted out of my faith, comfort and control. Something changed for me when I was around thirty. I can't quite put a finger on it but maybe it was being a husband and a father. Maybe it was being a guidance counsellor in the school system and engaging students and families in situations that were foreign to my background.

Jesus began to do a work on my heart and the more I read scripture the more I realized that it is not so black and white like I was led to believe. There is a bit of grey. There is a bit of mystery and there are some characters with messy lives. Abraham, David, Paul, I mean some of the biggies, they didn't have it all together. That is when I realized that Jesus does some of his best work in the margins. In the lives of those we would least expect and maybe I am exhibit #1. How else would you explain me, Paul McIlwraith, a pastor? I still shake my head at that one. Over the 23 years that I have been in this role, my theology has changed. Why? Primarily because of the people God has brought into my life, on the way.

In my office I have sat with adulterers and pedophiles. I have visited rapists and murderers in jails. I have cried with too many parents who have had to bury their children. I have visited with people in psychiatric hospitals. I have heard the heart wrench of those trying to come to grips with same sex attraction. I have been humbled by the stories of abuse survivors.

I have had to make the painful decision to turn my back on people, who desperately needed help but were not willing or ready to take the first step. I have walked to a toilet with a drug addict who wanted me to watch her flush her marijuana as proof that she had finally had enough of the damage it was doing to her and her relationships.

I have officiated at almost 300 funerals, many of them my friends and performed over 200 weddings. I have counselled hundreds of people struggling in their marriages, addictions, self-esteem issues and mental illness. I have walked with dozens of people in the final days of their life due to a terminal illness. I have had to fire fellow pastors caught in

immorality. I have been privy to some of the highest highs in people's lives and their lowest lows.

I tell you all of those things not to glorify them or put myself on a pedestal but to say to you, all of that, I would never have chosen this pathway for myself. Remember, I am the one who likes comfort and control. I look at the destination but am not so big on the journey to get there. But God has used each one of these encounters on the journey of my life, to break my heart for what breaks his.

To listen to stories, real stories of pain and heartbreak, hopelessness and despair and to come to the conclusion that no one, no one is beyond the saving and redemptive power of Jesus Christ.

If you are here today, and you feel like you have done things in your life that are just too despicable, there is no way, Jesus could ever forgive you. The story of Zacchaeus should give you hope. Jesus loves you and desires to come to you. Will you welcome him into your life today? No one is beyond the saving power of Jesus. Do you believe that? Do we believe that church? If so, are we providing opportunities for people to see Jesus here, even if they don't act like us, look like us or even think like us? Or are we intent on keeping our holy huddles, where we feel safe and in control but we are blocking the view of Jesus for those who really want and need to see him.

If this message has kind of made you feel uneasy, I think that is good but here is what I suggest. Take it to God in prayer. Go to scripture but then take a walk through your neighbourhood, school or workplace and invite Jesus to allow you to see that environment the way that he does. Engage in conversations with people you normally wouldn't, people that maybe are not like you. Volunteer to serve in places that may be uncomfortable. Get a little messy. Surrender that fear and control to Jesus in prayer and then watch what happens because something will happen. I think we do a huge disservice to this story of Zacchaeus in the bible when we pass it off as a silly Children's story. It has deep implications for the way we live our lives as followers of Jesus and the way that we carry out the mission of the church in our world today.

Amen? Amen. Let's pray.

Points to Ponder

On The Way ~ Zacchaeus

Luke 19:1-10

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. Are you someone who likes to arrive at the destination or do you enjoy the journey on the way? Can you think of any trips or vacations you have made where you were able to enjoy or learn from the experience of getting there? Share an example with your group.
2. Who do you think would be the equivalent of a tax collector in our society today? Describe why you feel that way.
3. Have you ever been so passionate about something that you didn't care what people thought of the way you acted? Share the situation with your group.
4. If you were in the crowd around Jesus on this day in Jericho, how do you think you would have responded to Zacchaeus' antics? How would you have responded when Jesus invited himself to Zacchaeus' house?
5. Do you relate more to Zacchaeus or the crowd? Why?
6. Do you think that North Park is a place where people who are genuinely seeking Jesus, feel welcomed and safe to continue their spiritual journey? Why or why not?
7. What would it mean for you to enter into the mess of the lives of the people God has brought around you at this time? What is stopping you from going there?

Prayer and Action Item

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed. Pray that God will give you some practical ways that instead of blocking people's view of Jesus, you can actually work to enhance their view.

