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"Re-Formation"

Habakkuk 1:1-4 Luke 19:1-10 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4

INTRODUCTION TO HABAKKUK 1:1-4

Habakkuk prayed and prophesied in a time of impending crisis. Externally the nation of Babylon was increasing in power and influence. Internally the people of God were caught up in religious and moral bewilderment. The leaders were oppressing the poor so he asks God why the wicked are allowed to prosper.

INTRODUCTION TO LUKE 19:1-10

Last week we heard from Rev. Greg Han about a parable about a rich religious man and a rich tax collector in worship. In this morning's gospel lesson, we see more than a parable. We see an encounter between a rich tax collector by the name of Zacchaeus and Jesus. Hear the word of God from Luke 19:1-10

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After years of service in the slums of Calcutta finally Mother Teresa this year was finally declared a saint by Pope Francis. In the scriptures however, a saint is simply a follower of Jesus. Paul opened his letters to the Philippians, the Colossians and the Ephesians by saying, "to the saints." A saint is a person that follows Jesus. Greetings saints at Faith!

In the 7<sup>th</sup> century November 1 was designated as All Saints Day. In the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, on the night before All Saints Day, October 31, 1517, Martin Luther, a Roman Catholic monk, tacked his 95 Theses, his 95 changes he wanted to see, his 95 protests on the door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany. That act began a Re-formation of the church. That Reformation spilled over to Geneva, Switzerland where an exiled lawyer named John Calvin began to teach similar reforms. While there, a man named John Knox came from Scotland to study with Calvin. He returned to his native Scotland and started what became the Church of Scotland, from where we Presbyterians trace our beginnings.

Today there are all kinds of Presbyterians all around the world. We have grown to become far more than just Scottish believers. The two concerts I have been a part of recently to raise awareness and promote racial healing have featured Presbyterians from Ghana and Cameroon as well as North America. As Presbyterians we have missionaries and missions all around the world. Ever since leaving Scotland we have been striving to reach ALL THE SAINTS around the world. This morning we give thanks for all the Saints who from their labors rest—and the rest of the Saints called to "Come Labor On."

One of the key concepts of the Reformation is that the church is "reformed, always reforming according to the word of God." This week I read an article that said that the church today needs reforming. It said that the days of people sitting in rows listening to a lecture for 20 minutes are fleeting. The latest in Educational

theory suggests that people learn better by interacting than just listening. If you look at Jesus' teaching, he taught in short parables that sparked more questions that provided pat answers

The last Reformation took place in part as a result of the invention of the Printing Press. The Bible became available for people to read it for themselves. The Reformation that is happening is taking place in part as a result of the internet.

I want to try something. How many of you have a cell phone with you this morning? How many of you have a Facebook or Twitter or Instagram account? Would you please take out your cell phone and check in. If you are on Facebook go to your home page and in the right hand corner there is a black teardrop on the right hand top of the screen. Click on that icon and type in the search bar Faith Presbyterian Church Baytown. Then write in, "I'm loving Reformation Sunday at Faith Presbyterian today-or something like that. Now everyone of your friends can see and their friends can see that you celebrated Faithful Saints Sunday here. Maybe some of them had no idea you were a Presbyterian. You've just shared you faith with thousands of people! Maybe some of them will come and see what all the fuss is about next week.....for Pledge Dedication Sunday!

Who is a saint? Is it a holier than thou person who has it all together? Is it only people like Mother Teresa who had to have 3 documented miracles to her credit to achieve that status? Who has been an influential person in your Faith Journey? Turn to a different person and share with them a saint who helped you on your journey. Maybe it's a family member, a friend, a teacher, a pastor, a neighbor...

Now, let's look at St. Zacchaeus and his reformation. I wonder what got Zacchaeus up the tree in the first place. I wonder if the parable that Jesus told about the Pharisee and the tax collector that Rev. Han shared with you last week had made the rounds to Jericho yet. I wonder if Zacchaeus had heard the rumors that Jesus ate with tax collectors. I wonder if it was in hopes that maybe he too could be forgiven and "freed" that "treed" Zacchaeus.

We're only told three facts about Zacchaeus: He was the chief tax collector, that he was rich and that he was short. This is the only time in the New Testament that the term "Chief tax collector." It meant that he was over an entire district. As chief tax collector, he was considered to be a traitor to his people and nation. To them he was a collaborator and agent of the imperialist Romans who had imposed their rule on Palestine by military conquest and occupation. Though Rome required a certain amount in taxes from its colonial subjects, it also turned a blind eye to how much the tax collector was able to gouge for his own pockets above and beyond the required sum. That's how Zacchaeus became rich. So long as he was not so greedy that he incited actual revolt, he was free to fleece his fellow-citizens for as much as he could get them to cough up.

A man on vacation was strolling along outside his hotel in Acapulco, enjoying the sunny Mexican weather. He heard the screams of a woman kneeling in front of a child. The man knew enough Spanish to determine that the boy had swallowed a coin. Seizing the child by the heels, the man held him up, gave him a few shakes, and an American quarter dropped to the sidewalk. "Oh, thank you sir!" cried the woman. "You seemed to know just how to get it out of him. Are you a doctor?" "No, ma'am," replied the man. "I'm with the United States Internal Revenue Service. This was Zacchaeus. A shake down artist. A man who could get the last quarter out of you.

When Jesus sees Zacchaeus he stops beneath the tree and says, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." And Luke says, "So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him.

Not everyone was happy. Surrounding Jesus and Zacchaeus is a crowd of good, law-abiding, patriotic citizens who know whom to despise and whom to approve. Jesus' attention to Zacchaeus is not appreciated at all by the other onlookers. Why should he single out Zacchaeus to provide the honor of hospitality rather than some of them who remain steadfast in their hatred of the Romans and in their support of nationalistic aspirations? Why go stay in the home of a sinner? It's one thing to love sinners in the abstract; it's another to sleep and eat in their houses.

But if Zacchaeus was "out on a limb" in the literal sense, he's even more "out on a limb" when he stands down on the ground before Jesus. Jesus' invitation to come down out of his tree, and his unexpected and gracious offer to come stay in his house calls forth from Zacchaeus a similarly unexpected and grace-filled response. Before he knows what he is saying Zacchaeus blurts out, "Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if (that's a BIG IF) I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." Now that's what I call coming down! That's tithes times 5 and offerings times 4!

Notice Jesus has not demanded anything of Zacchaeus. Jesus hasn't censured him for being a tax collector. He hasn't said a word about his sinful gouging of his fellow citizens to enrich his own coffers. He hasn't breathed the word "traitor." He's just announced his intention to stay with Zacchaeus. And yet that offer presents Zacchaeus with a demand that is far more fraught with risk than anything he has ever done or dreamed of doing. This offer of grace, for that's what it is, calls forth willingness on Zacchaeus' part to respond in kind.

Perhaps that's where this blurted out promise of generosity comes from -- from Zacchaeus' dreams of being a better person than he is. As he stands before Jesus, perhaps he sees himself, not as he is, but as the benefactor of the poor and the righter of wrongs that he longed to become.

What would it be for us to see ourselves as we might become, and to commit

ourselves to begin living by that vision rather than by what we think of ourselves or what others think of us? It's a scary risk to catch a vision of what we might become with the help of grace. It's risky to step out of our comfort zones, our familiar sins, our cherished self-images, and stand before Jesus exposed for what we are, and challenged to become what we might become.

I believe that the encounter with the living Christ produces just that effect in us. We see ourselves in a light we never saw ourselves in before. We see that we are as unworthy and sinful as we admit in the privacy of our own hearts, and that we may become better and more useful than we hardly dared to dream. This encounter with the living Christ which calls forth from us qualities of character and behavior we never knew or allowed, but perhaps always hoped, we had is nothing less than a miracle of grace.

Salvation came to Zacchaeus because he was willing to go out on a limb to see Jesus and was enabled to see himself as a result of his responding to Jesus calling his name and him coming down. For us, salvation comes the same way. Salvation comes to us when we are willing to risk becoming all that we can be through the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Where are you this morning? Have you heard Jesus call your name and you're coming down? Are you ready to respond to God's grace and blurt out your response to His invitation what and who you really want to be? Has salvation come to your house today? Has it come to your house years ago and now you are facing the challenge of following through on your commitment?

To merge two churches and build this church we certainly went out on a limb. . Jesus saw us and called us to come down. He has asked us to take him home with us and is asking us to join him in building a home for others through this church so they can discover who God is calling them to be and become.

Next Sunday we will be focusing on God's call to us and what answering that call means in terms of our commitment to the Kingdom of God and to this church through our acts of service, and pledges of monetary support. Next Sunday will be our Pledge Dedication Sunday—Growing Faith 2017. It won't be like the Channel 8 Telethon. We won't break into worship and ask you to give and not continue the service until you do, but and at the time of our offering we will ask those of you who are committed to being a part of Faith Presbyterian Church to bring forward your Pledge cards.

I believe Jesus called my name. I believe he has called yours or may very well be calling yours this morning. The Jesus who treed Zacchaeus is calling us to take the next step in continuing to support this church. It will require patience and acts of service. It will require sacrificial giving. It will require our lifting up Jesus that He may draw all manner of folks unto him self—even those we may not think are worthy of becoming "saints" like us. It will require our taking Jesus

home with us. It will require our willingness to accept those that Jesus calls who find themselves willing to join us. It will require a continuing ongoing...re-formation.

Let's pray. God be with us in our homes; in hospital rooms, offices, and board rooms. Lord, we pray that you would guide us in the days and weeks to come, that we might continue your healing work in our midst. Help us to stand in your perfect love which casts out fear and speak words of love and peace, words that would draw us nearer to one another and to you. This election season has shown us something about ourselves and our neighbors that we don't like. Forgive us for the pride that wells up within us as we label and dismiss those who hold opinions or positions different from our own. Teach us to forgive those who have scared us, offended us, and wounded us by what they have said or done. Help us to find a way to come together as the people you have called us to be. We give to you our hopes and our dreams, our doubts and our fears. Amen.~ Andrew Parnell

Thank you Jesus for spying us wherever we were. Thank you for calling us by name, and inviting yourself into our lives. Thank you for this church, this gathering of saints who are called to follow you and serve our community. Thank you for the possibilities and the promises, and the potential to reach many for your kingdom. We pledge to welcome anyone you draw to yourself through us.

On this Sunday when we celebrate the beginning of the Reformation of your church we give thanks for all the saints who heard you call their names and who came down and responded with acts of service and sacrificial giving. We thank you for the church that survived and held the light through to Dark Ages so that there could be a church TO BE reformed.

We thank you for Zacchaeus. For the vivid example he is to us that no one is too far gone and no one is beyond being reached by you. Hear us now as we name those who have gone before us this past year who are now receiving their heavenly reward.

These things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.