

**Sermon for the Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost,  
November 3, 2019**

**Said Mass**

**By the Reverend Stephen Gerth**

*Year C, Proper 26: Isaiah 1:10–20; Psalm 32:1–8; 2 Thessalonians 1:1–5, 11–12\*;*

*Luke 19:1–10*

Jesus is on the road to Jericho and Jerusalem. In Mark, there's a man who kneels and asks Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" When he tells Jesus he has observed the law from his youth, Mark says, "Jesus looking upon him loved him."<sup>1</sup> Jesus tells the man to sell all that he has and to give the money to the poor. Jesus assures him he will have treasure in heaven, and says, "Come, follow me."<sup>2</sup> But the man stands and walks away.

In Matthew, he's a young man. He doesn't kneel before Jesus. But words about the following the law, selling possessions, giving to the poor, treasures in heaven, the invitation to follow, and the young man's response is the same. In Luke, the man is a ruler and the conversation and the outcome are as in Mark and Matthew.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 10:17–22.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 19:16–22.

<sup>3</sup> Luke 18:18–23.

Then in all three gospels, Jesus says,—and these words are from Luke—“How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!”<sup>4</sup> And in all three—again from Luke—the disciples ask, “Who then can be saved?”<sup>5</sup> Today’s gospel lesson answers that question: a person who is looking for Jesus when Jesus is looking for him or her.

Over the last two Sundays, we heard Jesus’ teaching that his disciples should pray always and not lose heart—the story of the unjust judge and the persistent widow.<sup>6</sup> Last Sunday, we heard the story of the Pharisee who thought he was righteous and the tax collector who asked God for mercy because he knew he was a sinner.

For whatever reason, our lectionary leaves out another teaching and another encounter just before they arrive at Jericho that also answer the question, “Who then can be saved?” The disciples are trying to keep “even infants” away from Jesus.<sup>7</sup> Jesus says, “Let the children come to me . . . whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 18:24.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 18:26; Mark 10:26; Matthew 19:25.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 18:1–8.

<sup>7</sup> Luke 18:15–17.

<sup>8</sup> Luke 18:16–17.

As they near Jericho, they are not alone. There's a blind beggar who hears the crowd and wants to know why they are walking by him. He's told, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by."<sup>9</sup> So, the blind beggar cries out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"<sup>10</sup> This time, it's not the disciples but the crowd who try to keep Jesus from hearing him. He continued to cry, "Son of David, have mercy on me."<sup>11</sup> Jesus hears him and asks, "What do you want me to do for you?" He said, 'Lord, let me receive my sight.'<sup>12</sup> He hears Jesus say, "Receive your sight; your faith has made you well."<sup>13</sup> Luke continues with today's gospel lesson, Jesus entering Jericho. And we hear words from Jesus himself telling everyone who is he is: "Salvation" and he is the One who has come "to seek and to save the lost."<sup>14</sup>

The criticism of the Pharisees and scribes, that "This man receives sinners and eats with them,"<sup>15</sup> led Jesus to speak about a shepherd with a single lost sheep, a woman with a lost coin, and a father with a lost child.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Luke 18:35–43.

<sup>10</sup> Luke 18:38.

<sup>11</sup> Luke 18:39.

<sup>12</sup> Luke 18:41.

<sup>13</sup> Luke 18:43.

<sup>14</sup> Luke 19:10.

<sup>15</sup> Luke 15:2.

<sup>16</sup> Luke 15:3–32.

Jesus is still Jesus, the Son of God.<sup>17</sup> I think it's fair to say that Jesus knows Zacchaeus will be in the tree.

Zacchaeus is a rich sinner, a tax collector, who is honest enough with himself to acknowledge and confess the wrongs he has done. He has been living in spiritual darkness—a dishonest life that has separated him from his neighbor and his Maker. Jesus doesn't ask him to do anything but receive him in his home as an overnight guest. Jesus becomes the guest who never leaves Zacchaeus, even though he leaves his home so he can go one final time to Jerusalem.

Several weeks ago, when I went to greet a couple of women at a weekday Eucharist, one of them told me she didn't receive Communion, not because we weren't Roman Catholic, but because I said that the angel Gabriel told Mary that God himself had decided that she would bare his Son—and that she really didn't have any choice in the matter. I referred her to the first chapter of Luke in the Roman Catholic Bible used in English language services in the United States.

We live in a time when our popular culture is increasingly unkind to faith in the public square. The children of the baby boom generation, may have grown

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<sup>17</sup> Luke 15:3–32.

up attending church with their parents for at least part of their childhoods, but fewer and fewer have an active connection to a community of faith. As far as I know, none of my four nieces was taught by their parents how to pray.

That said, I believe that the Lord Jesus is still active in the lives of my siblings and their spouses and in the lives of my nieces. And when the time is right, they will be looking for the Lord and discover that he has been looking for them since before they were born—and like Mary, like us, they have no choice about God's plan: Jesus seeks and saves the lost.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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