

Dear Friends in Christ,

Webster's Dictionary online defines "generous" as "willing to give and share unstintingly." I take that to mean "someone who gives without holding back." Such was the woman whom Jesus pointed out in Mark 12. **"But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. 43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."** (NIV 1984 Mk 12:42–44) We might even say that she set a world record for giving and not holding back, she gave everything she had. What moved her to do this? We have a clue in the Gospel reading for today.

Here we meet a man named Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus is remarkable for his generosity. In this account we also learn the reason why. It is because of Jesus. What we learn will spur us to be generous because **Overwhelming Gratitude Leads to Overwhelming Generosity.**

I mentioned last week that Jesus was traveling to Jerusalem to die. He is very close now, but on this day he is in the city of Jericho not far from Jerusalem. There he is looking for a man.

1. The Lord's generosity brings salvation.

On another occasion Jesus was looking to help a tax collector by the name of Matthew. At that time Jesus had said, **"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick."** On this occasion Jesus states, **"The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."** The Lord's generosity includes seeking and saving the lost.

A. Jesus was looking for a lost man by the name of Zacchaeus.

1. Jesus is true man, but he is also the Son of God. So he knows right where to find Zacchaeus. He walks right up to a tree, looks up, and asks Zacchaeus to climb down. Zacchaeus was short and the only way he could see Jesus, through the large crowd, was to climb a sycamore tree.

2. Some people would consider Zacchaeus' shortness a problem. Jesus did not. He came to address a real problem. Zacchaeus was a cheat. He had cheated many people by charging them too much for their taxes. If anyone

objected he had the muscle of the Roman army to make people pay. Tax collector's could make a lot of money this way. We can imagine a chief tax collector was in a position to make even more wealth.

Why was Zacchaeus trying to see Jesus? What was going through his mind? He at some point began to realize that there was more to life than money. Tax collectors were reviled by the Jews, so it is safe to say that he didn't have much of social life apart from other tax collectors. I would guess that Zacchaeus knew that his cheating and others sins had cut him off from any relationship with God. He felt very lost and alone. It is also likely that Zacchaeus had heard that Jesus didn't just ignore people like himself. After all, one of his followers, Matthew, was a former tax collector. Perhaps Jesus would help him. Jesus tells us he came to seek and to save the lost.

3. We could say that Zacchaeus was the opposite of generous. He had been very selfish. How are you? There is a story I want to share. *"A small boy was given two apples and told to divide them with his sister, and in doing so to be generous in giving her the larger one. He said finally, "Look Ma, you give her the apples and ask her to be generous."*

Tan, P. L. (1996). Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times (p. 290). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

Isn't that how we are? We like the idea of being generous until we have to give something up. Deep in our hearts we want to take and keep things for ourselves. We may not be the big time swindlers that Zacchaeus was, but who of us can say we have never once taken something from someone else? Besides inside we have greedy thoughts. St. Paul gives us a list of those who are lost, **"Do not be deceived:...thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."** (1 Corinthians 6:9,10) Our sins put us in the same shoes as Zacchaeus. We need the Lord's help. Jesus came to seek and save us too.

B. When Jesus speaks at Zacchaeus' house, he calls Zacchaeus a **"true son of Abraham."** Zacchaeus is no longer lost. What Jesus is says is important for us, but what does he mean?

1. What Zacchaeus needed more than social interaction or being accepted by the good people in society was this that he needed the forgiveness of sins with God. It wasn't just Zacchaeus, the cheating tax collector, who needed this but so did Abraham, the father of the Jews. Perhaps Jesus mentioned the passage from Genesis 15:6 where it says, **"Abraham believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness."** If Jesus used this passage he would have explained that all who believe like Abraham are saved. Abraham

believed in the coming Savior. The reason Abraham was saved is because he believed that Savior was able to forgive his sins. Anyone who believes as Abraham did receives forgiveness and is a true son or daughter of Abraham.

2. Jesus had announced to his own disciples how he, the Savior, was going to win that forgiveness of sins for all people. In the previous chapter Luke 18 Jesus said, **“Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, “We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again.”** (31-33) At the end of Luke’s Gospel, after Easter, Jesus told his disciples, **“This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations.”** (Luke 24:46,47)

Like Zacchaeus, we are saved today, because we believe in Jesus like Abraham did. We believe that he generously took away our sins at the cross. We also are true sons and daughters of Abraham.

2. The Lord’s generosity creates generosity.

There is a part of this event that we have not yet looked at and that is Zacchaeus’ reaction to the Lord’s generous forgiveness. Zacchaeus is grateful and we see him responding to the Lord’s generosity. He becomes very generous.

A. While Jesus is in his home Zacchaeus announces his intention to be generous.

1. Someone might think he is showing off. However, I believe Zacchaeus is showing that he will not delay in saying “thank you” to God, but he will demonstrate his thankfulness immediately and in concrete actions.

Sometimes we may want to show our gratitude to God, but we wait around for the right moment or the right opportunity. Zacchaeus teaches us not to drag our feet. It was important for him to show his gratitude and do it soon.

2. What he did was give away half of his wealth to the poor. And if he cheated anyone, he would pay them back four times the amount. This was generous. The law of Moses only required the original amount plus twenty percent. He was giving what four times what he owed to anyone he had cheated. (Numbers 5:7)

B. Surprisingly, not everyone was happy.

1. Contrasted with this generous attitude is the muttering of the people in verse 7. It says, **“All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.”** You would think that the people would have been happy that Jesus was trying to help Zaccheaus change. The attitude of some people was that Zacchaeus didn’t deserve attention from Jesus. They believed that his kind couldn’t be saved. Jesus words and actions showed that they were wrong.

2. Are we guilty sometimes of happily bringing our gifts when we see the cute children in Africa and Haiti are in need? However, we don’t want to give so quickly when it is going to some mission where they are reaching out to drunks, wierdos and people struggling with some perversion? Don’t fall that into the trap thinking that some people deserve God’s mercy more than others. Don’t judge that some people can’t be saved. That is what the people of Jesus’ day did all too often. We need to ask Jesus to forgive us for dragging our feet. He will. We need to ask Jesus’ help to bring our offerings without hesitation to be used for the proclamation of forgiveness wherever we can. We need to be ready to share forgiveness with whoever asks.

Conclusion: (Pictures on the screen of Shepherd of the Valley) Years ago people were generous in sending their gifts to buy land, to build a church and to help furnish the church. The people of the church did not deserve this generosity, but love for Jesus moved people to send their gifts.

You and I have been blessed and continue to be blessed as Jesus generously comes to you in Word and Sacrament. As we stand in awe of all that he does for us, gratitude will move us to be generous. We want to continue the Gospel work that has been started here. We can be generous in inviting all kinds of people. We can be generous in welcoming people to our church. We can be generous in supporting the ministry. We learn from Zacchaeus that gratitude for Jesus results in overflowing generosity. Amen.