

A few months ago, Kyle and I got away for a weekend to Atlanta to attend Dragon Con, which is essentially a convention for any fandom you could ever think of. When we arrived on Friday, we got the convention packet and were surprised to see a parade listed for Saturday morning. I'll admit that my first thought was "isn't that cute, they're going to have a little parade of nerdy things." It was thus, a really big surprise to the both of us when we left our hotel Saturday morning to find streets lined with people three rows deep. And to walk block after block to find more of the same. We ended up stationing ourselves behind a sidewalk where we found a very slight incline, catching just snippets of the full parade (floats and all) that lasted for almost an hour.

This image came back to me as I thought of our gospel story for today and of Zacchaeus, who as the lectionary says was "short of stature". I empathized with him as I remembered trying to peek over others heads so that I could see *anything* in the Dragon Con parade. And then I realized the difference – in my situation I opted to just find an okay position, willing to miss some of what was before me, compared to Zacchaeus who "ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree" so that he could see Jesus. I tried to image myself climbing a tree at my parade and realized how ridiculous and extreme it seemed. I think it was just as ridiculous and extreme for Zacchaeus to do it.

But when Jesus sees Zacchaeus, he doesn't laugh at him. Instead Jesus sees his excitement and determination and calls Zacchaeus to him. And Zacchaeus responds, not by hiding, but by coming to Jesus. In the translation read today we hear that Zacchaeus "was happy to welcome him", but in several other translations¹ it says that Zacchaeus "received him joyfully". I think this distinction is important because as adults, joy is often perceived as an emotion that is "too much". Imagine if, instead of the standard greeting of the Usher at the church door, they instead ran down to your car as you pulled in, opened your door for you, helped you out of the car, and almost pulled you into the church building. To receive someone with joy is an ecstatic emotion that cannot be contained. And so, as I think of Zacchaeus receiving Jesus, I seem him bouncing a little, unable to contain his joy.

And when others complain about Zacchaeus being a sinner, what does he do? The translation that we heard a few moments ago says that he repents; "I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much" he tells Jesus. While our translation is accurate, in the Greek of the New Testament, it is equally as accurate to read Zacchaeus as saying not "I WILL give to the poor and pay back anything I've taken" but as "I ALREADY do these things". I think both interpretations have something to teach us, but for today I

¹ King James Version, English Standard Version

want to focus on the version of the story that has Zacchaeus claiming his already-present goodness.

John Grant wrote our stewardship reflection for this week found in your bulletin (it is well worth reading, so I hope you will take the time to read it). In it he makes the delightful and accurate comparison between Zacchaeus and Thankful. Like Zacchaeus, Thankful is small, but determined. Though I am not longstanding here, in my 5 months of attending Thankful, I too can see the similarities. Like Zacchaeus, Thankful Ones persevere in doing good work, even when that work sometimes goes unnoticed. Riley reminded us of that two weeks ago in his sermon as he named the many good gifts that each of you bring to our community and our mission in the communities around us.

And like Zacchaeus, Thankful Ones tend to remain humble. Unlike the Pharisee in last week's parable who compares himself in pride to "others" not like him, Zacchaeus doesn't brag about the things that he does until he is forced to defend his own honor. Thankful Ones, too, continue to walk together faithfully and joyfully without drawing a lot of attention to ourselves.

Finally, Zacchaeus literally goes "out on a limb", a decision that seems silly or extreme, to meet Jesus. You might say that Thankful is metaphorically going "out on a limb" in our own ways, too. We have gone "out on a limb" when we took

out a loan so that we can make space more useful for others both within and outside of our community. We go “out on a limb” as we begin to ponder, calmly and faithfully, what this community might look like without Mother Leyla as its rector, instead trusting that the Lord will sustain and guide us. And we each go “out on a limb” when we consider what we might be able to give to this community financially, possibly making a difficult stretch because we know that our commitment to Christ’s work through and among Thankful Ones is worth it.

It is easy to do as I did at Dragon Con, and stand behind the crowd, peering over their heads and seeing a little of the fun in front of me. The truth is that it is much scarier to climb out there on that limb. But let us not forget that when Zacchaeus puts himself “out on a limb”, he is not left to fall. Instead, Jesus calls him by name to new and deeper works. The good news is that Jesus sees us and steps up to greet us as well. Jesus sees us on that limb, the limb of a loan, or a change, or a pledge or any other limb you might be on for Jesus, and he calls us to join him in the work of love in the world. And when this happens we, like Zacchaeus, will experience the great joy to be found in receiving Jesus. And that is certainly something for which we can be THANKFUL.