

Luke 19: 1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because Jesus was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

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Zaccheaus and the Red Sox on All Saints' Day

Yesterday was an extraordinary day to be a Bostonian. The day broke warm and sunny, nearing 65 by mid-morning. The tall trees of Boston Common and the Public Garden were flushed red, yellow and orange, still donned in fall's finery. Slowly the streets around our parish house on Beacon Street and the church here on Tremont began to fill with families and college students, young working people and seniors, people of all shades and sizes, from every neighborhood, from all around New England. I stood with a man from Colorado who flew in just for the day.

Most in the crowd wore Red Sox garb of one kind or another – hats, shirts, jackets, or fake beards. The young man next to me had on an army helmet and goggles, to mimic Sox player Jonny Gomes. By 11 AM, near the Boston Common on Boylston Street where I stood, the crowd was thirty-deep on one side, ten deep on the other. I couldn't initially find my husband Bob and his friends, but they saw me and hailed me over.

Here near the church, those who were lost looked for one another, too, and pressed up against our gate. All of us, whatever our location, were anticipating the ones we were waiting for. Everyone craned heads and necks, stood on tip toe, leaned right or left among the crowd, to catch a glimpse of the 2013 World Series Champions, our Boston Red Sox, riding Duck Boats on parade.

Wasn't it remarkable, to be right here, in person, among so many in the crowd, straining to see the unlikely winners, who no one – no one – gave a chance to during Spring Training? Wasn't it remarkable to see it on TV, to view the pictures on the

news night or in the paper this morning? So many in the crowd, from every walk of life!

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Being among that huge throng yesterday made me think of another person, in another crowd, straining and craning to see. Luke writes: "[Zaccheus] was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because [Jesus] was going to pass that way."

Jesus was going through the big city of Jericho, on his way to Jerusalem, as surely as the Red Sox duck boats were coming through Boston. Jesus had become well known; word had spread so people gathered to see him when he walked by

Maybe Zaccheus just wanted to see him in the flesh – as I wanted to see, in person, those I'd viewed only on TV. It's human curiosity – to *see* the ones we've heard so much about. To stand near, look at real guys with skin and eyes and smiles. "Yeah," he really looks that way, I thought": Gold Glove winner Dustin Pedroia short and earnest; winning pitcher John Lackey, mouthing "Thank you" as chants boomed his name. Lack-ey! Lack-ey!

Maybe Zaccheus had the same natural curiosity – to lay eyes on this Jesus about whom everyone had been buzzing. To get some sense of the man as he walked by.

But Jesus didn't have police barricades that separated him from those on the road. Maybe he had friends who grouped around him and shielded him, but it seems that at least some people got close enough to touch Jesus, hoping they'd get his attention and be healed. In other bible stories we hear about lepers who shouted out to get his attention; about the bleeding woman who touched the hem of Jesus' robe; about the parents who brought their little children to Jesus, but the disciple guards barked, "No – stay away!"

People seemed to want to be near Jesus, not just out of curiosity, but also because they thought Jesus could help them. That something about him might cure them of the massive heartaches or body aches that had plagued them for so long. So they thronged around him. Were the crowds in Jericho six deep that day? Or ten or twenty deep? They were large enough that Zaccheus couldn't see a thing unless he *ran* -- ran way up ahead along the parade route and climbed into a tree.

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I'm guessing that Zaccheus felt pretty good about scoring a good perch to see; wouldn't you? But of course Zaccheus knew that from the tree he couldn't actually be near Jesus, wouldn't be touched or healed by Jesus, as those on the ground might.

But it was okay, apparently, or the best he thought he could hope for. He'd grown used to being shunted aside...

And then the duck boat with Big Papi on it stops right in front of Zaccheus. Just stops. And the Star of the whole show is not only *seen by* Zaccheus; the Star *sees* Zaccheus, too. Jesus looks Zaccheus right in the eye, starts talking to Zaccheus, and then invites himself to dinner at Zaccheus' house. Jesus says, I want to be with you!

So in one fell swoop, the parade is over. The duck boat motor is turned off. It never finishes the expected route, because the Star is now heading on a different path, over to the house of Zaccheus, the greatest honor imaginable for Zaccheus.

And the rest of the crowd? They're furious. Because in their eyes Zaccheus is scum. He steals money from them: as a tax collector, he skims off extra for himself, from his sister and brother Jews. He's a disgrace to Judaism, but for some completely unknown reason, Jesus has chosen to eat with Zaccheus, is giving *him* the stamp of approval as someone worth spending time with. *What?*

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Everyone's worth spending time with, says Jesus. No one's lost forever. No one. Out of a huge crowd, Jesus notices if someone shows the slightest interest in spending time with him. And then Jesus stops everything and says, "Sure! I'd love that. Let's talk some more. Let's grab a bite together."

No one is ever lost. "The Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost," says Jesus. "It's my job – it's why I'm here: to seek out and save the lost. No one ever is lost in the crowd, in God's eyes."

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And yet.....Hasn't each of us felt lost, at one time or another? Maybe you feel lost today.

It may be sunny outside, but you're in a fog, not sure where to turn. The demands on you are so great, but you're hesitant to ask anyone for help, because everyone else is busy, too.

You're in a job that isn't fulfilling, or in schoolwork that isn't meaningful, but you can't imagine a realistic path out of it. Maybe you've been without a job for far too long, and there are no prospects.

Perhaps you've alienated people by past behavior, and they won't let you get past it, to start over afresh. You had a life partner, but they're gone, and days are painfully long and lonely. You hear less well, or walk less well, or remember less well, and just feel lost.

So we gamely keep trying to screw up our courage, but it's getting more difficult to push through the day without getting discouraged.

It's hard to be lost, and especially hard to be lost in a crowd, when others seem to know where they're going or are there with friends. You just perch somewhere by yourself, maybe up in a tree, separated from everyone else. Separated because of your situation, or your money, or your past reputation. Just feeling lost.

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Jesus says No one is ever lost for me. I will seek them out. I want to find them and be with them. The Love that grounds Life moves inexorably toward you, like water seeking lowest ground. Love moves to be with you, reside within you, surround you, encourage you. Somehow. Perhaps through someone who shows an interest. Maybe even through this place here, and the people in it.

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Today for All Saint's Day we lit candles for those who used to come to this place, who sat in these pews, who worked for this church, who volunteered hours, or spent time with fellow parishioners. Those who encouraged us and laughed. Who sought out others and gave a bit of themselves away. Maybe they gave a lot of themselves away.

Because when we feel like we have a church home, when we feel like we've been found again, that's what we do: we give thanks and give parts of ourselves away - in time or treasure. It's what Zaccheus did, once he felt found: he gave away money, joyfully.

No one is ever lost forever, Jesus says. That includes those who have died, who we honor today. As our last hymn said, they are not lost, just gone of before us. In this dimension of time and space, we can't foretell how those who have died continue to be alive, somehow, and are not lost to us forever, but we catch glimpses of it with the candles we light.

Because when we blow out our candles at the end of this service, the flame of light will become a long trail of smoke, rising up, and curling into the air, blending into it. The flame is not lost forever, but *changed*. Changed into something else, but still with us, surrounding us, in the air.

As the candle's light is changed, not ended, none of those who have died is lost to us forever. Those we mourn this All Saints Day somehow do remain with us and among us. Changed. Gone on before us.

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During communion, we'll reaffirm this: that God remains with us always. That no one is lost forever. That nothing can separate us from God, not even death. Communion is another meal, as if Jesus is saying the same words to us that he said to Zaccheus: sit down and eat with me, will you? Let's be together again.

As in time, dear friends, we all with gather with the saints, by and by.

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I don't know how this will happen. But when I come here, when I share communion with you, when I see the duck boat suddenly slam on its brakes for one of you, then another, then another – when I see lives change, and lost ones found, when I see people give away part of themselves to help another, then I've glimpsed resurrection again.

No one – *no one* -- is lost to Love forever. Not even scummy ZaccheAus. Not you, not me. Hallelujah!

Amen.