

October 30, 2016
“It’s Just Money”
Luke 19:1-10
MBPC
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“How to talk about money” is not a class we pastors take in seminary. Indeed, for many of us, talking about money from the pulpit seems downright sacrilegious. For others it seems “too personal for church.” Our unease with money goes way back.

In 1517, Martin Luther sparked the Protestant Reformation in part by condemning the Roman Catholic Church’s abuse of money. The church was selling indulgences, which were essentially tickets to get out of purgatory and into heaven faster (like TSA Pre for heaven!).

There are plenty of contemporary Christian groups who are unashamed about money. The prosperity Gospel movement-views the Bible as a financial contract: if we have faith in God, God will reward us with material wealth. I attended one of those churches a few times in the early ‘80s and I heard the pastor actually say this: “Go to Nordstrom’s, buy the best tailor made suit, and show people how God takes care of his kids!” That was my last Sunday.

For good reason, people are leery about the church-getting too involved in money matters.

But the real issue for Christians is not money itself. The real issue is how we GET our money and then of course what we DO with it.

So why would the church shy away from the topic?

Jesus talked more about money than any other topic beside the “Kingdom of God.” 11/39 of his parables were about money. The Gospel writers forged money and faith together; this is especially so in Luke, which is the source of today’s story.

So here we encounter Zacchaeus — the small in stature tax collector who lived his life on the outside of his community because of how *he got his money* and *what he did with it*.

As chief tax collector, Zacchaeus was an entrepreneur who colluded with the Roman officials to collect taxes, tariffs, tolls in Jericho, a major center of taxation. Chief tax collectors paid their contracts in advance; then they would hire others to collect the taxes and thereby make a profit off what was collected. Tax collectors were considered highly dishonest. They were hated by other Jews for their complicity in

the Roman occupation. As such, Zacchaeus, would have been despised by many in his community.

Jesus was passing through Jericho toward Jerusalem for the Passover. Zacchaeus raced into the scene ahead of the crowd and climbed into a tree to see who Jesus was.

Zacchaeus was no Bernie Madoff, but it could have been just as strange as seeing Mr Madoff hanging from a light pole during the St Patrick's Day parade.

We aren't privy to Zacchaeus' interior life--what kind of spiritual journey he was on.

That's the thing. We never really know what's going on in another person's inner life. Who in your life, right now, might be going through a powerful spiritual transformation growing and changing in ways you'd never have thought possible? It might be your boss or friend or spouse or child -- the one you'd least expect.

God help us, if we ever become too cynical to believe that every person has the capacity for transformation. As Jesus said about the rich young ruler: Humanly speaking it is impossible, but with God, all things are possible.

Maybe the Holy Spirit had been working and working on Zacchaeus' heart.

As creatures made in God's image, is a spiritual space that is for God and God alone—the place in our souls where we are most human, most whole, most authentically ourselves, most at home; where the fingerprint of God resides.

Some have called the space the “God shaped void” in our lives. Blaise Pascal called it The Infinite Abyss. And we all seek to find what might fill that space.

Zacchaeus had a spiritual space inside of him that he filled with unethical profit—loads of money, but also shame, I imagine. There were not enough shekels in the Roman Empire that would fill Zacchaeus' void.

Zacchaeus was curious to see Jesus, so from the branch the man watched. When Jesus reached the tree, it was Jesus who looked Zacchaeus in the eye as if he had been waiting for him to show up, and said, *Come on down. I must stay at your house today.*

I imagine Zacchaeus nearly falling out of the tree. He had come to see Jesus; BUT it was he who was seen and known by Jesus. You see, We think we are the ones doing the seeking after God. Deciding for ourselves to let God in or not. But in actuality it is God who is relentlessly seeking after us.

God knows each of us by name. As Jesus says a little later, when others criticize him for staying with Zacchaeus, “The Son of Man has come *to seek out* and save the lost.”

Jesus did not call Zacchaeus down to publicly condemn him or to demand that he repay what he had stolen. Quite the opposite! He publicly honored Zacchaeus, breaking down barriers, inviting himself into Zacchaeus’ home, and naming him a son of Abraham.

Jesus always drew the circle wider to include those who were considered the outcast, the unclean, the unethical, the immoral, the ones who didn’t belong.

Jesus met Zacchaeus where he was and then moved on in.

God does the same for each of us.

God meets us where we are,
and offers to fill the vacancy inside of us.

Like gushing water, Zacchaeus confessed his sin
and committed to loosening his grip on his money
and gave away half his wealth;
and paid back fourfold what he had stolen.

His money became money used for *just purposes*. Zacchaeus asked for forgiveness to those he knowingly stole from; he made right his wrongs.

John Calvin said “Zacchaeus changed from a wolf into not only a sheep but even into a shepherd.”

Zacchaeus been replacing the holy space inside of himself with wealth. And each one of us has our own version of an attachment. Each of us has to determine what it is that’s cluttering up our spiritual space, keeping us from making room for God.

I think some of you might recognize yourselves in Zacchaeus. You might be taking a look at Jesus from a distance. Or, as some of you have shared with me, one day you wandered into Montview curious about what kind of church this was, what was going on inside, and you immediately felt at home. You’ve never left. Hallelujah.

Perhaps your presence in this church started you on a spiritual journey you never imagined. Hallelujah.

Growing in our relationship with God re-prioritizes our lives every day. God’s grace shapes a whole new way of living in the world—aligning what and whom we value with what and whom God values.

Frederick Buechner, said this:

“Those moments that we are deeply touched by Jesus,

we see another way of being human in this world..."

He says,

"We carry within us a vision for wholeness that is our true home.

No matter how much the world shatters us to pieces, . . . The deepest current of our lives is God's image in us

which seeks to draw us toward a fullness of maturity in our lives,
a full human hood." *The Longing for Home*

Zacchaeus' spiritual journey toward wholeness began the instant he was addressed by Jesus by name. Zacchaeus' attitude toward money in the face of his new relationship with God became: **IT'S *Just* MONEY.**

As we grow spiritually, we recognize that God wants to claim our hearts for the gospel. It is then that our money and time and stuff embody an outpouring of our love. Generosity captures the heart of our spiritual maturity.

God's invitation is ALWAYS

Come, live into the wholeness you were called to.

Not out of guilt, not out of fear,
not out self righteousness,

but out of a confidence that you will grow in your faith if you live -bit by bit, step by step—with an open heart; that we offer up (daily if we can muster the courage) all we are and all we have, the big stuff and the little stuff, our past and our future, into God's gracious hands.

And with the exuberance of Zacchaeus, we say, It's all yours, O God. It's all yours.