

It's Reformation Sunday and the perfect day to look back at our history as a church. I know you are expecting some thoughtful reflection on the teachings of Martin Luther but I want to go back much further – all the way back to Jesus and a wee little man named Zacchaeus.

I'm counting on you knowing the story of this wee little man who climbed a tree in order to see Jesus. Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector and used that corrupt tax system to elevate himself, to gain wealth and power and to prey on his neighbors. He was so short he climbed a tree and in so doing successfully elevated himself even above Jesus.

Jesus stopped in the road as he passed by and commanded Zacchaeus to come down. Come down! Jesus said, and see yourself among the people you are defrauding.

Come down and stand on level ground with neighbors and relatives. Come down and see yourself as you truly are and how your actions impact others.

Jesus stopped and commanded Zacchaeus to act – not later, and not someday - **but that very moment to do what God commanded of him.** Come down, Zacchaeus, I'm about to enter your house.

This was the voice of authority. **Jesus was in charge**, and **not** this very rich tax collector! Zacchaeus was about to learn that when you turn to God seeking in your life, you need to be willing to receive the answers that God is about to give – most especially when those answers hurt.

Grace entered Zacchaeus' life when Jesus walked past that tree– a grace so powerful that Zacchaeus responded with vigor – giving away his ill gotten gains, restoring money to those he'd strong armed.

A lot of us might think that the hardest part of this story is all that money that Zacchaeus gave away, but in the end, money is just money. **The hardest part of this story was welcoming Jesus into a well guarded life, into a well guarded home.** Zacchaeus had no place to hide; he either accepted Jesus with bare naked honesty and experienced the wholeness of salvation.....or he limped away, unchanged.

On this Reformation Day, let us think of Zacchaeus as Christ's church. That tax collector represents all of us who have been called to respond to an invitation and open ourselves to Jesus. As the church, we are called to come down from our lofty perch – our perch of righteous living or pious behavior or proper doctrine or right worship – to stand among our neighbors and friends and allow Jesus to enter this house – our house - TODAY.

**But welcoming Jesus into our house, requires taking down our defenses.** It's time for our eyes to be opened and for us to respond to those in pain today. In order for the church to be reformed, we must be grounded in confession and repentance – that is where true reformation begins. Now is the time for binding up the world's wounds – some that we have caused and some that we've allowed to fester.

Lutheran history is riddled with wounds from the very beginning. There was Luther's anti-semitism and 500 years of marginalizing women. We have relegated people of color to back water churches and paid their pastors less than a living wage.

We have preached diversity yet insulted Latino folk whose cultures and histories differ from our mainstream German-Scandinavian history. We have pretended that the liturgical forms familiar to us are somehow eternal truth. We have failed to receive our human sexuality in all its forms as a gift from God. **We have made Jesus, a middle Eastern Jew into a blond haired, blue eyed savior.**

Like our filthy rich tax collector, we are a part of the problem and we have caused too much of the pain. It's time to face Jesus and to recognize our sin.

Then **when we are left without any bargaining chips, without any defense**, - then the grace about which we preach, and on which we depend, then that GRACE is truly free and brings salvation.

We must come out of hiding, begin to see, hear and talk TRUTH. We can take the steps needed for a new church to emerge. We can declare aloud along with Zacchaeus – I'll pay everyone back – I'll restore what I've stolen, I'll fix what I've broken and in my own little corner of the world, I'll commit to doing what I can to bring healing.

Clinging to the blindness of history – the long history of Lutheran doctrine, the history of how things have always been done, the history of what folks have always thought... continues to shut the door on Jesus. **Instead, we are called to cling to Jesus, the value he places upon every human being, and the life that is found in him.**

Reformation is grounded in repentance – when we are bent over by the weight of the pain around us. We will need to Come Down from our lofty perch and stand among the wounded without excuses about who we are. We need to talk truth.

History continues to unfold. Jesus continues to call one and all to open themselves to life in God and therefore, open themselves to healing. The problems we wrestle with in 2022 are different from those of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. or even Luther's time. Culture has changed, society has shifted.

But salvation always comes to us as the gift of Jesus – who loves us enough to insist on the truth from each of us, and from Christ's church as well. Once again we are asked to be bold – to let go of everything that keeps us from living out the life God has prepared for all of God's people.

Let us not tarry another year but take those first steps towards living into the salvation that Jesus has prepared for us. It's time to come down out of our tree and embrace the Savior who offers us life.