

Sermon for October 30, 2022  
Proper 26c  
21<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
The Rev. Canon Raymond Raney  
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church  
Los Alamos, New Mexico

Isaiah 1:10-18  
Psalm 32:1-8  
2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12  
Luke 19:1-10

Today is the day before All Hallow's Eve, or Halloween.

Talking with the Vestry last year, It was made it clear to me that Halloween in Los Alamos is overdone – so I'll leave that to you all to celebrate.

Of course, Halloween is the day before All Saints Day, Nov 1st, which is the day before All Souls Day on Nov 2nd.

On November 1, All Saints, we celebrate all the saints who have been designated saints by the church.

On November 2, All Souls Day, we celebrate all the faithful departed, who have preceded us in death.

We will be setting up an *Ofrenda* this week as an altar of observance, with photos of the folks we have all loved.

The *Ofrenda* is something we observe here on All Saints Sunday next week, to mark our remembrance of those who came before.

Next Sunday we will remember those whose love preceded us and read their names to the ringing of the bell to note their passing.

Moving on to the lessons of today, there is a connection – Death and Taxes.

I'm not sure anyone actually likes to pay their taxes.

Collecting all the numbers, compiling the receipts, making sure you have all the required forms, filing the return. Is it any wonder?

Well, I remember the first time I did my taxes.

I was preparing to write the check, grimacing about filling in INTERNAL REVENUE on the payment line, when I saw the check was to be made out to the U.S. Treasury.

I actually felt a sense of pride at supporting this country.

Now though, the filing is electronic, and besides, Linda took over the management of our finances so I don't write the checks anymore.

Back in Jesus' day, though, taxes were a more fluid calculation. Tax collectors could actually add fees to support themselves – sometimes exorbitant fees.

Last week we heard of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector praying in the Temple, and Jesus declared the one who said: "Lord have mercy on me, a sinner" went home justified.

Well, if you remember, I questioned whether the tax collector actually was "justified." Did he change his ways?

Like the tax collector in the Temple, we read today of Zacchaeus, another a tax collector, and not just any tax collector, but the CHIEF TAX COLLECTOR – the most sinful of the sinners.

Zacchaeus was, to his community, a sinner, He was a man who exploited his own people to make himself rich.

Suddenly, he is thrust into the light, and his life changes.

And as the standard interpretation goes, Zacchaeus repents and gives half of all he has to the poor, and returns four times the money to anyone he has defrauded.

In the Greek there are two tenses at work: one is what he states and his future intentions, and the other is what he states and his ongoing recompense - so what Zacchaeus says to Jesus can be translated two ways. Zacchaeus could be saying, as the NRSV states:

"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."

In another interpretation, Zacchaeus would be saying:

"Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I am in the habit of giving to the poor; and if I have defraud anyone of anything, I am in the habit of giving back four times as much."

The interesting thing is, rather than confessing and then being absolved, Zacchaeus is forgiven before his confession of faith.

Oh my, the Grace of God is a marvelous thing, and it is a wondrous gift that Jesus bestows on this short little man.

Any of you learn this song in Sunday School?

*Zacchaeus was a wee little man,  
and a wee little man was he.  
He climbed up in a sycamore tree,  
for the Lord he wanted to see.  
And as the Savior passed that way,  
He looked up in the tree,  
And he said, "Zacchaeus, you come down;  
"For I'm going to your house today,  
for I'm going to your house today."*

To go to the house of this sinner, Jesus is defying all the social norms of that community. Jesus holds up Zacchaeus as a "son of Abraham," and tells the community that they must no longer consider this tax collector an outsider, someone to be shunned, but a member of the community to be embraced by one and all.

It seems to me that Zacchaeus has heard the teachings of Jesus, has understood his obligations to the community, and is running to see the man who has changed his life so completely that he cannot believe he will have the chance to see Jesus with his own eyes.

Not only does he see Jesus, but this man who has saved him, wants to have dinner with him.

What we would give to see the face of the man who changed our lives. What would we give to walk with him, and invite him to our table, and have his blessing.

Allow me to tell you a short personal story about my Aunt Margie, God rest her soul.

When I was seven, I came down with Polio, and my cousin, Greggy, was diagnosed the same day.

We were both rushed to Riley Children's Hospital in Indianapolis, and received the best possible care.

I lived and he died.

His mother, my Aunt Margie, was not a Christian at the time.

She cursed God and refused any consolation from her sister, my mother.

She wanted no part of church, or anybody's sympathy.  
She just wanted to be left alone in her bitterness.

Some years later her daughter, Shawna, convinced her to return to church, and gradually, Margie accepted Jesus and followed Christ.

A few years later Shawna, my cousin, died at age twelve.

Margie mourned Shawna,  
but instead of feeling bitterness and anger toward God,  
she thanked the Lord for having been blessed to have had her daughter for the time she had been  
given.

The Christian is not promised an easy life,  
but the difference I witnessed in the life my aunt lived  
convinces me that God does touch the lives of those around us,  
and oh, what a difference Christ makes in the life we live.