

There may be times in your life where you wish to remain unseen and not heard. But there are many points in your life when you need and want to be visible. Your voice *needs* to be heard. You may not need a big stage or a large platform, but all us need to be seen and heard.

One of the worst feelings can be that you become invisible; or no one is listening to you.

The story of Zacchaeus is a fascinating story. He was the chief tax collector, and is well known for defrauding many people of a lot of money. He does not have many friends in Jericho. He could be described as thief; and he became wealthy on the backs of a lot of poor people.

When passing through the region, Jesus looks up to catch the eye of Zacchaeus in the tree, and does the most extraordinary thing. Jesus *sees* him - of all people. Jesus invites himself over to Zacchaeus' home to stay. Jesus becomes Zacchaeus' guest. This captures a lot of attention.



Jesus has already been criticized for eating and drinking with the tax collectors and sinners. In response to such criticism Jesus tells the story of the father and the two sons. The younger son, having squandered his father's estate with dissolute living in a foreign country, comes back to beg his father to make him like one of the hired hands. But instead the father throws a great banquet for him and exclaims, "This son of mine was dead, and is alive again; was lost, and is found." In contrast, the older son refuses to participate or even acknowledge that his younger brother is alive. It is a powerful story that illustrates Jesus' commitment to the ones most deserving of condemnation.

We also heard the story of the dishonest manager, the widow and the unjust judge, the cleansing of the lepers, and the tax collector who prayed for mercy. In all of these stories there is an offer of mercy to people who were the most unexpected recipients of it; and an offer of attention to people who became the most unexpected hosts of Jesus' company. In other words, it was clearly understood that these people didn't *deserve* mercy, and certainly didn't deserve Jesus' company. But in Jesus' presence they became visible and heard.

For Jesus to invite himself to stay at Zacchaeus' home would be something that was noticed as rather alarming. In fact, Zacchaeus himself is a bit shocked. "Who me? Are you sure that you have the right person? Surely you must be looking at another person in this tree?"

The act of Jesus staying with Zacchaeus that day changed the entire socio-economic structure of Jericho. In the presence of Jesus *everything* changes. Zacchaeus pledges to sell half of his possessions and give the money to the poor; and he pledges to repay all whom he defrauded *four* times as much as he took. It is an extraordinarily generous act of putting things right that will change the lives for many people in Jericho.

"Clearly," Jesus says, "salvation has come to this house today." It is an Ebenezer Scrooge moment of recognition. It is a Grinch in Who-ville moment when his small heart grows four times larger. Zacchaeus has an epiphany that sets him free. There would be much rejoicing in Jericho that night, as the poor were lifted up; and Zacchaeus was so moved that his stature in the community changed from being a small man who was hated and despised, to everyone's best friend. Debts were cancelled, rents could be paid, and food could be bought. People who were invisible and unheard were seen and recognized.

Everything changes in the presence of Jesus. You see the whole trajectory of the gospel narrative, and indeed the calling of the church, is as Jesus says, "to seek out and to save the lost." Whether it be the younger brother who spent everything, the dishonest manager who was about to lose his job, the widow pleading for justice, the paralytic who couldn't reach Jesus, the blind beggar in the ditch, the criminal on the cross, or Saul breathing threats of murder - Jesus comes to these people, the ones who were most despised, rejected and condemned and not only *stays* with them, but actually *becomes* one of them. That's the whole thrust of the incarnation: Jesus became one of us in order to seek us out and save us from ourselves because we were incapable of healing ourselves.

All of this great narrative is recalled in the sign of the eucharist. This small wafer of bread and this shared chalice, is the sign of the great event of the incarnation — that Jesus becomes present in our world, looks at us and says, "come down as I must stay with you today." And in coming into the presence of Jesus, like Jacob in the wilderness, Moses in the burning bush, and Zacchaeus in Jericho, we are changed to become more generous, more open in heart, and more merciful to the other.