

KRAMER CHAPEL
THURSDAY IN TRINITY III

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SAVING THE LOST
Saint Luke 19:1-10

+Jesu Juva+

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost (Lk 19:10).

Was Zacchaeus really lost? Unethical perhaps? A self-conscious little man trying to compensate for his short stature...asserting himself to make sure that he was not overlooked by his peers? Stingy and ego-centered as he attempted to elevate himself with illicit revenue gained from the hardworking folks of Jericho? But lost? Separated from God and living under divine condemnation and headed for an eternity in hell? Is the consequence of life without Jesus Christ really that bleak? Was Zacchaeus really lost?

Commenting on the theology reflected in the Second Vatican Council, Hermann Sasse observed that after the Council it is hard for a self-respecting pagan to go to hell according to the Church of Rome. Hell is not a popular topic in contemporary theological discourse. One recent book by a German systematician on eschatology doesn't even have an entry for "hell" in its index. It is said that Christianity must be understood as inclusive, inclusive also of "anonymous Christians" that is, people who are Christians even if they do not know it yet. It is argued that the scope of God's mercy is so wide that the thought of hell must be dismissed.

If that is the case we can hardly say that Zacchaeus was lost. Perhaps Zacchaeus was lost in the vast emptiness of his wealth, imprisoned in his greed. Maybe he lost his identity as a Jew in exchange for a career of profit as a chief tax collector. It could be that he was troubled by an uneasy conscience over his less than honest tax assessments. If that is true, then, Zacchaeus' could find his life by adopting some moral principles. He could run down to the local synagogue store and buy a WWMD (What Would Moses Do? bracet) that would remind him to be gutsy enough to conform his life to the high standards of Moses so that he could become a man of character. No doubt he could work at his addictions, finding a support group to hold him accountable. He could go to a self-esteem seminar for short

people. He could get some career counseling and find a job that would boost his self-image. That is all well and good, but Zacchaeus would still be lost. This son of Abraham would still be an enemy of God. He would still be dead in his trespasses and sins.

Zacchaeus was lost. Not simply confused, misguided, or unethical...but lost. So lost that we could never find himself. So lost that he could never navigate his way back to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Zacchaeus' condition is that of all humanity apart from faith in Jesus Christ. It is spiritual death. Not mere emptiness or meaningless, but a life that is lived under God's wrath awaiting a dead that brings God's judgment, hell.

Zacchaeus does not find himself. Even though he climbs up in that sycamore tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus, he does not find Jesus. Jesus finds him. When Jesus lays His eyes of mercy on Zacchaeus, He calls him down out of the branches. He says to this little tax collector, "I must stay at your house today." This is the "must" of divine necessity. Just as the Son of Man must go to Jerusalem to suffer, die, and rise again, so He must be with lost sinners like Zacchaeus for He is the friend of sinners.

So much is our Lord's desire to be the Savior for Zacchaeus, that He must be at his house, under his roof. That is the way of the One who came to seek and to save the lost. He is Immanuel, God –with –us so much to the point that He puts Himself with us, taking our sin upon Himself and carries it to the cross. He is the God who comes to visit His people with mercy in place of wrath, grace instead of judgment, forgiveness of sins rather than condemnation. In short, where Jesus is, there is salvation. Salvation resided at Zacchaeus' house because Jesus was there! Now Zacchaeus, the lost tax collector is found. Indeed he is a true son of Abraham because he belongs to Christ and is an heir according to the promise.

"Today salvation has come to this house." Salvation comes because Jesus comes. When Jesus preached in the synagogue of his home town Nazareth, He announced "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 4:21). When Jesus absolved the penitent thief, He comforted that criminal saying "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Lk 23:43). Now He comes to the home of Zacchaeus and proclaims "Today salvation has come to this house." Where Jesus is, there is salvation.

He comes not because Zacchaeus mended his ways, denounced his life of greed, and made appropriate amends; although Zacchaeus moved by the generosity of God's goodness in Christ would indeed give of his possessions to the poor and restore with fourfold abundance those that he cheated. Jesus comes simply because He is the Son of Man, who seeks and saves those who are lost and condemned creatures, purchasing and winning us not with silver or gold but with His holy and precious blood and His innocent suffering and death.

“Today salvation has come to this house....for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost.” Amen.

The peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting.