

Reflections from a United Methodist Pastor

August 2, 2020

Lesson 9

A Life-Changing Encounter

Luke 19:1-10

By Belton Joyner

Haven't you heard the phrase "Be careful what you wish for"? Zacchaeus climbed a tree so he could get a better view of this Jesus who seemed to be drawing such a big crowd. He got a better view all right! Jesus invited him down out of the tree and said he was coming to visit. Zacchaeus got to see Jesus up close and personal! (Luke 19:4)

Sometimes, we want to check out Jesus but prefer not to get too close. If we get too close, someone might mistake us for a fundamentalist religious zealot. If we get too close, we might have to re-order our priorities. If we get too close, Jesus may even ask us to get closer, such as "I must stay in your home today" (Luke 19:5).

I remember being at a Vacation Bible School program when the children were acting out the story of Zacchaeus. One of the little boys--about four years old--had been put up on a branch of a small tree. The little girl who was playing the role of Jesus walked over to the tree and called out, "Zacchaeus, come down from that tree. I want to go to your house for supper." The boy did not move, so she yelled it even louder, "Come down right now so I can go to your house for supper!" No movement. The little girl put her hands on her hips and shouted, "You're supposed to come down!" The boy said, with a touch of fright in his voice, "I can't get down by myself." And one of the adults helped him down from the tree. "Zacchaeus" and "Jesus" walked off together.

The good news is that if we can't get down by ourselves, the hospitality and caring of the people of God can give us a hand. Few of us got to know Jesus on our own. Someone or several "someones" helped us out of the tree. A teacher. A parent. A pastor. A neighbor. A sibling. A friend. Who helped you out of the tree so Jesus could stay in your home, in your life?

Thanks be to God that you wanted a better view of our Lord. Thanks be to God for those who helped you come down to accept Jesus into your home and life.

Sometimes we are in the tree. Sometimes we are helping others from the tree. But in both conditions, we are moving that there might be a better view of Jesus.

Prayer: As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Lord, I want to see you better."

Belton Joyner is a retired elder in the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church. He has served in a variety of local church and connectional responsibilities. His publications range from church school curriculum to theology popularization to mystery novels. He has written these weekly thoughts on the lessons in Adult Bible Studies for his conference newsletter since December 2001. They are printed here with permission.