

**"Sinner in a Tree"**

**Luke 19:1-10**

**All Saints Sunday, November 3, 2013**

**Mary Taylor Memorial**

**United Methodist Church, Milford, CT**

**Script written by the Rev. Dr. Christopher Holmes**

**Enacted by the Rev. Dr. Brian R. Bodt, Pastor**

**SINNER IN A TREE**

Luke 19:1-10

*(This is a one-person dramatic reading that can be used as a Sunday message, or adapted for use elsewhere. A three piece banker's suit and slanted felt hat helps to establish the character of Zacchaeus. A ladder set up in front of the pulpit makes an excellent tree.)*

I suppose you are wondering what I'm doing up here, right?

Don't tell me you don't remember. I saw how shocked and horrified you were last week when Jesus called me down out of this tree. Well, I was sitting right here on this very branch.

Wait, don't leave. Don't leave. Come on back, please. (DEFENSIVELY, AS IF EVERYONE IS WALKING AWAY.) Listen to me for a few minutes. I've got some things to get off my chest. O.K, if you won't listen because it's me who's talking, maybe you will listen because I have an announcement to make concerning your taxes. That's right, and it's good news! But first, hear me out.

I know you don't like me — God knows you've kept it no secret. Some of you used to beat me up in basketball in P.E. Remember? Yeah, you remember. It's not easy being this short. (CAN BE FUNNY IF THE ACTOR IS TALL.) Remember the time I walked by the church choir and you all started singing, "Short people ain't got nobody to love . . ." (LIGHTLY) Well, it's true. So I made a promise to myself a long time ago that I was going to do whatever it took to get back at you. Nobody was going to push little Zacchaeus around any more. No sir. So, I took the job as tax collector, and gladly! And, I've made every last one of you sorry for the way you used to treat me.

Well, things are different now. Most of you heard what happened to me here last week. But you haven't heard it from me, so you're going to.

Everybody was gathered around because they said Jesus was passing along the street. I wanted to see this guy because I had heard what he did earlier to my friend, Levi. Levi is a tax collector like me you know, and was sitting in the tax office one night when Jesus walked in and said, "Follow me." That's all he said. And Levi followed him and had a big dinner at his house for Jesus along with the whole crowd of tax collectors, except me. I was afraid to go that night for some reason. But I remember what you all said the next day. You jumped all over Jesus for dining with dishonest people. And, remember what he said?

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but the sinners to repentance."

After Levi told me that, I was curious enough to want to see the man myself last week. But you would not let me through the crowd. I pushed and shoved to get close enough to see. I guess that's how my life has been all along — always on the fringe. I never could seem to break through the crowd. Being so short, I climbed this old tree for a better view.

I could see him in the distance and then he stopped when he got to me, and looked up. I just about died! He kept looking at me and then he called my name. He said, "Zacchaeus." I almost lost my grip and fell out of that tree. It seemed like I just went limp all of a sudden. A big knot turned in my stomach. It felt like my bones crumbled inside.

He smiled and said, "Come on down, we'll have lunch." I still couldn't believe it. I got down in a big hurry and by this time I was so excited I didn't know what to do.

Then I heard you all in the background start laughing and grumbling. I heard you say, "Zacchaeus? But he's a sinner." I felt like yelling back, "That's right I am, but tell me who, here, isn't." I held myself back though and started planning in my mind the feast we were going to have. It had been so long since anyone had been to my house for dinner. You know, I never felt so tall as I did that day walking side-by-side with Jesus himself. This time you all stepped back and moved out of the way.

Well, we got to my house and I started to feel real uncomfortable. I mean — here was the Son of God eating off of fine china I'd purchased with dishonest money. I remembered Jacob's words, "I am not worthy of the least of all Thy mercies." And, I recalled the words of the centurion — "I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof." I started to say those words to Jesus — "I am not worthy . . ." but he cut me off because he knew what I was going to say. He didn't answer with "That's ok, forget it." He didn't say, "You're right, you aren't worthy." He simply told me to look deep into His eyes. What I saw reflected there, was the Zacchaeus I was meant to be. For the first time in my life I didn't see "a sawed-off social disaster, with a big bank account and a crooked job." I saw me — a human being capable of wonderful things and loved, *loved* for the first time in my life.

Do you know what my name means in Greek, literally? I'll bet you would never guess — it means "pure and righteous." And, it took Jesus to make me believe it.

Well, you have all been very patient in hearing me out. Maybe you've just stayed to hear about the tax announcement, I don't know. If so, here it is: (CLIMBING THE LADDER TO MAKE AN ANNOUNCEMENT IN A LOUD VOICE)

From this day forward, half of all of my wealth goes to the poor. (AS THOUGH THERE ARE MURMURS) Wait, quiet please. Furthermore, I promise to repay every person I have cheated — four-fold. Yes, that's right.

Remember, you may say of yourself, "I'm not worthy, I am a sinner." Well, I am here to tell you that you are worthy. If Christ can change me, me of all people, he can surely change you! For Jesus came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

(WALKING OUT OF THE SANCTUARY, PAUSE TO SPEAK TO SOMEONE IN A PEW, HANDING HIM/HER A HANDFUL OF COINS OR JEWELS)

My friend, will you accept this as a sign of my repayment and much more for all the wrong I have done to you? (PAUSING TO SPEAK WITH SOMEONE ELSE)

And you my friend, please take these jewels along with my apologies for overcharging your account.

To the rest of you I will make amends four-fold the harm I have done you, outside in the marketplace. (PAUSE AS IF TO ASK SOMETHING VERY IMPORTANT)

Oh yes, and forgive me please. Forgive me. God bless you.