

Fourth Sunday before Advent

Sunday between 30 October and 5 November inclusive • OT31

Principal Service readings

Isaiah 1.10-18 Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow
Psalm 32.1-8 Happy the one whose transgression is forgiven
2 Thessalonians 1.1-12 Thanksgiving and encouragement
Luke 19.1-10 Zacchaeus

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Zacchaeus

¹Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. ²A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax-collector and was rich. ³He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. ⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus, because he was going to pass that way. ⁵When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.' ⁶So he hurried down and was happy to welcome Jesus. ⁷All who saw it began to grumble and said, 'He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.' ⁸Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, '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.' ⁹Then Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.'

Luke 19.1-10 NRSV¹

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Comments and Questions

Mention of Jericho allows Luke to combine the healing of the blind man (18.35-43) with that of Zacchaeus (19.1-10). The story of Zacchaeus is only present in Luke's gospel. Right at the start of the story we are told that Zacchaeus is a rich man and a tax collector (19.2). As a tax collector for the Roman authorities he was looked down on by the Jews because he was a collaborator. He has acquired his riches through his collaboration with the Romans. We are not told his motivation for wanting to see Jesus, only that he was short in stature and wanted to be able to see Jesus as he passed by (19.4).

Zacchaeus might have been the one to make an effort to catch a glimpse of Jesus, but Jesus is the one who invites him down and says he must stay at Zacchaeus' house (19.5). Zacchaeus responds positively to Jesus' request. As Jesus enters Zacchaeus' house people grumble because they regard Zacchaeus a sinner. Zacchaeus, however continues to respond positively to Jesus, promising to give half his possessions to the poor and to pay back any who have been victimised by his desire for profit, refunding them four times as much as he has taken (19.8). The net result is that Zacchaeus receives salvation (19.9).

No one is excluded by the call of Jesus to participate in the kingdom. However, the rich must give up their riches. The kingdom is also for those who are marginalised or socially on the 'outside'. Jesus' intention is always to save.

Being a true child of Abraham is not about heredity or entitlement, but about responding to a call: sharing and living as a brother or sister of others.

Quotations

1

Christianity is a religion of continuity and discontinuity as well. It's about what stays the same and what changes in the twinkling of an eye. Both are necessary truths, but sometimes it's important to accentuate the discontinuity, the sudden leap, the way you go up a tree, Zacchaeus, and come down a saint.,

Francis Spufford, 1964–

2

When one has looked upon Jesus, though he be of little stature like Zacchaeus of old (cf. Lk. 19:3), and climb up on the top of the sycamore tree by mortifying his members which are upon the earth (cf. Col. 3:5), and having risen above the body of humiliation, then he shall receive the Word, and it shall be said to him, This day has salvation come to this house (cf. Lk. 19:9). Then let him lay hold on the salvation, and bring forth fruit more perfectly, scattering and pouring forth rightly that which as a publican he wrongly gathered.

Gregory of Nazianzus, 329–390

Related topics

For further study:

Salvation/soteriology; eschatology; justice; kingdom of God; Jesus Christ, Saviour of the World; repentance

Closing Prayer

Just and merciful God,
true Lord of every house,
sure delight of every heart,
come into our midst today
to speak your word and satisfy our hunger.

Enable us to see you clearly,
to welcome you with joy,
and to give justice and mercy
a place in our lives.

Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

Opening prayers · Week 31, Year C²

CPL • LBC Year C before Advent 4.odt • 2022-09-24

2 *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.*