

The Fourth Sunday before Advent -OCTOBER 30, 2016



In the work of justice, forgiveness can feel like weakness, giving up the high ground, or letting “perpetrators” off the hook. But, until we can admit our own faults, and reach out to those we may disagree with or oppose, we have not learned the way of Christ. And if we truly believe that God’s reign is the way to healing and liberation for our world, then we must also embrace forgiveness – both received and given – as an integral part of God’s work among us and in us

INTRODUCTIONS

For use by lectors, in order of service, parish bulletins and magazines

Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4: Habakkuk complains to God that justice is perverted and God’s help does not come, but then, as he waits for God’s answer, God’s word comes to him offering him a vision of the downfall of the proud and the vibrant life of the righteous.
OR **Isaiah 1:10-18**: God expresses displeasure at the feasts and sacrifices of God’s people, because these acts of worship are not accompanied by justice and compassion. But, God also assures the people of forgiveness and restoration if they repent and change their ways.

Psalms 119:137-144: The psalmist celebrates God’s regulations, affirming their value and goodness for all time, and giving thanks for the strength they offer even in times of hardship.
OR **Psalms 32:1-7**: There is blessing and liberation in confessing our sins to God and receiving God’s forgiveness.

2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12: Paul celebrates the faith, love and endurance of the Thessalonian Christians in the face of persecution and hardship, and prays for God’s strength to sustain and inspire them, so that they may glorify God.

Luke 19:1-10: In Jericho Jesus invites himself to be a guest at the house of a chief tax collector, Zacchaeus, in spite of the criticisms of people. As a result, Zacchaeus is transformed into a man of generosity and compassion.

[Click here to view the readings](#)

[http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Habakkuk](http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Habakkuk%201:1-4,%202:1-4%0Acw%20Psalm)

[%20119:137-144%0A2%20Thessalonians%201:1-4,%2011-12%0ALuke%2019:1-10](http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Habakkuk%201:1-4,%202:1-4%0Acw%20Psalm%20119:137-144%0A2%20Thessalonians%201:1-4,%2011-12%0ALuke%2019:1-10)

COLLECTS OF THE DAY

Collect One

O God, our refuge and strength,
who art the author of all godliness;
Be ready, we beseech thee, to hear

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the devout prayers of thy Church;
and grant that those things which we ask faithfully
we may obtain effectually;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Collect Two

Almighty and eternal God,
you have kindled the flame of love in the hearts of the saints:
Grant to us the same faith and power of love,
that, as we rejoice in their triumphs,
we may be sustained by their example and fellowship;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Presider or deacon

In the love of Christ that increases among us, let us offer prayers to God who gives the wealth of faith to the poor.

Deacon or other leader

For this holy gathering, and for the people of God in every place.
Lord, have mercy.

For all peoples and their leaders, and for mercy and justice throughout the world.
Lord, have mercy.

For good weather, abundant fruits of the earth, and peaceful times.
Lord, have mercy.

For those afflicted and oppressed, orphans and widows, the dying and the dead.
Lord, have mercy.

For our families and neighbors and for all the people of our *city./town/village*.
Lord, have mercy.

Lifting our voices with all creation, with Saint _____ and all the saints, let us
offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ.
To you, O Lord.

Presider

God of Abraham, whose Son came to seek and save the lost, hear the prayers we offer
this day and fill us with every good resolve and every work of faith; through Jesus Christ
our Lord.
Amen.

POST COMMUNION

Lord of heaven,
in this eucharist you have brought us near
to an innumerable company of angels
and to the spirits of the saints made perfect.
As in this food of our earthly pilgrimage
we have shared their fellowship,
so may we come to share their joy in heaven;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYERS

God of faithful surprises,
throughout the ages
you have made known your love and power
in unexpected ways and places.
May we daily perceive
the joy and wonder of your abiding presence
and offer our lives in gratitude
for our redemption. Amen.

In your Son you seek out and save the lost, O God,
and invite us to the banquet of your eternal home.
Visit your people with the joy of salvation
that we may rejoice in the riches of your forgiveness
and reach out in welcome to share with others
the fest of your love. Amen.

Holy God,
all our worship is met by the cleansing gaze of your passion for justice.
Enfold us in your grace
that we may embody our devotion in acts of justice
and in defense of the helpless,
to the glory of your name. Amen.

Friends in Christ,
God invites us to hold the needs of our sisters and brothers
as dear to us as our own needs.
Loving our neighbors as ourselves,
we offer our thanksgivings and our petitions
on behalf of the church and the world.
Hear our prayers, God of power,
and through the ministry of your Son
free us from the grip of the tomb,
that we may desire you as the fullness of life
and proclaim your saving deeds to all the world. Amen.

As you heard the prayer of Isaac and Rebekah, O God,
and guided them in the way of your love,
so listen now to those who call upon you.

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Move us to praise your gracious will,
for in Christ Jesus you have saved us from the deeds of death
and opened for us the hidden ways of your love.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lord God, friend of those in need,
your Son Jesus has untied our burdens
and healed our spirits.
We lift up the prayers of our hearts for those still burdened,
those seeking healing,
those in need within the church and the world.
Hear our prayers
that we may love you with our whole being
and willingly share the concerns of our neighbors. Amen.

Creator God,
you call us to love and serve you
with body, mind, and spirit
through loving your creation
and our sisters and brothers.
Open our hearts in compassion
and receive these petitions
on behalf of the needs of the church and the world.
Holy One,
hear our prayers and make us faithful stewards
of the fragile bounty of this earth
so that we may be entrusted with the riches of heaven. Amen.

We praise your abiding guidance, O God,
for you sent us Jesus, our Teacher and Messiah,
to model for us the way of love for the whole universe.
We offer these prayers of love
on behalf of ourselves and our neighbors,
on behalf of your creation and our fellow creatures.
Loving God,
open our ears to hear your word
and draw us closer to you,
that the whole world may be one with you
as you are one with us in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

God of mercy and healing,
you who hear the cries of those in need,
receive these petitions of your people
that all who are troubled
may know peace, comfort, and courage.
Life-giving God,
heal our lives,
that we may acknowledge your wonderful deeds
and offer you thanks from generation to generation
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

God of salvation,

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who sent your Son to seek out and save what is lost,
hear our prayers
on behalf of those who are lost in our day,
receiving these petitions and thanksgivings
with your unending compassion.

Redeeming Sustainer,
visit your people
and pour out your strength and courage upon us,
that we may hurry to make you welcome
not only in our concern for others,
but by serving them
generously and faithfully in your name. Amen.

Glory to you, O Champion of all Loves, who for our sake endured the cross, encountered the enemy and tasted death. Glory be to you, O King of all Kings, who for our salvation wrestled with principalities and powers, subdued the forces of hell and won the greatest of all victories. To you be all praise, all glory and all love; now and for ever. Amen. *Thomas Ken, 1637-1711*

Lord, I bring the poverty of my soul to be transformed by your beauty; the wildness of my passions to be tamed by your love; the stubbornness of my will to be conformed by your commandments and the yearnings of my heart to be renewed by your grace; both now and for ever. Amen. *Catherine of Genoa, 1447-1510*

Eternal God, you have been our resting-place through the ages. Generations come and pass away, but you abide forever. We praise you for your presence among us. You bring us comfort amid our trials - clarity where confusion persists - peace in the midst of conflict - and hope of eternal life. Hear us now as we pray for your Church and the needs of the world, for you are the God of our lives. We pray for the Church of Jesus Christ; that, begun, maintained and promoted by the Holy Spirit, it may be true, engaging, glad, and active, doing your will. Let your church be always faithful, O God, and ready to promote the cause of compassionate love and peace

We pray that as Christian disciples we may be a faithful witness in word and deed to the Good News of Christ's Love. We pray for all who govern and hold authority in the nations of the world. We pray that everywhere upon this earth there may be justice and peace. We continue to pray for peace in the world, especially those involved in the fight against terrorism and those struggling to provide humanitarian aid. Lord, we pray for all people in their daily life and work - for our families, friends, and neighbours, and for those who are alone. We name before you individuals and families experiencing personal hardship or facing an uncertain future, those who are separated from loved ones, those who grieve this today, and those who are sick in hospital or ill at home. Hear us Lord as we now lift up those people and those situations you have placed upon our hearts.

May it please you, O Lord, to enlighten my heart with the fire of your love. I offer my hands to do your work, my lips to sing your praise and my life to proclaim your glory. Look upon my neighbours in their needs and guide me and bless me as I serve you in them; for Jesus' sake. Amen. *Hildegard of Bingen, 1098-1179*

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May Jesus Christ, the King of glory, help us to make use of all the myrrh that God sends, and to offer him the true incense of our hearts; for his name's sake. Amen. *Johannes Tauler, Germany, 1300-1361*

LECTIONARY NOTES

REFLECTIONS ON THEME:

Once again the question of repentance and forgiveness is highlighted in the Lectionary. This time, there are two complimentary emphases in the readings. The first is the need to face our own darkness, greed, fear and empty worship, confess it and receive God's forgiveness for ourselves. Both Habakkuk and Isaiah reflect God's displeasure at lovelessness and faithlessness, and call for repentance. The psalms celebrate the goodness of God's law and the liberation that comes through repentance and forgiveness. The Gospel tells the story of someone who experiences this reality and is deeply changed and healed. The second emphasis this week is that of the need to offer grace, welcome and forgiveness to others, especially those we would usually be tempted to reject. Within all the readings, God's offer of forgiveness is extended to all. In Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, he encourages the church to remain faithful and loving even as they endure hardship and persecution. In the Gospel, Jesus reaches out to Zacchaeus, the hated tax collector, and enjoys fellowship with him, which is what ultimately transforms him.

CONNECTING WITH LIFE:

GLOBAL APPLICATION: It may seem that simplifying and clarifying issues necessitates a certain polarising of opinions and camps, but I'm not sure that the work of building a world of equity, peace and compassion is helped by this approach. I wonder what would happen if, instead of separating ourselves into groups who are "pro-life" or "pro-choice", for example, we rather worked together to reduce unwanted pregnancies and make alternatives more available and attractive to young mothers, while also ensuring that when abortion is required (for serious health or other legitimate reasons) it is done with reverence, reluctance and care. What if, instead of creating opposing forces with regard to issues of poverty, trade, climate change, immigration and health issues, we listened to one another's concerns and worked together to find solutions? This may seem like an impossible ideal, but one simple and powerful practice can help to facilitate this process: forgiveness. If we can recognise that our methods and attitudes aren't always helpful, and may in fact contribute to the injustice and pain of our world, we can confess, repent and receive the transforming forgiveness of God that leads us to behave in more compassionate, gracious and humble ways. Also, if we can approach those with whom we disagree with grace and forgiveness for the hurts they may have inflicted on us, or on those we defend, we open the door to creative and compassionate dialogue that can lead to new ways of being and doing for all. Ultimately, the underlying truth that opens us to forgiveness is that we are all part of the pain and brokenness of our world, even as we can all be part of the healing and restoration of it – and God's grace really is sufficient for us, individually and collectively.

LOCAL APPLICATION: In too many communities the work of justice and compassion is hindered by the way we separate ourselves along lines of organisation, denomination and religion. In our fear of one another and in our arrogance, we end up duplicating work, squandering resources that could be pooled and maximised, and even rejecting and offending those who need our love and ministry through our exclusivity, rigidity and close-mindedness. The impact of a forgiving attitude on these realities is not hard to discern. As

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we grow more ready to confess our own fear and sectarianism, we open ourselves to God's forgiveness and healing and we change, little by little, into the Christ-like, welcoming people we long to be. As we grow more ready to forgive and understand those with whom we differ, and to focus on our commonalities and shared values, we are able to offer forgiveness for perceived or actual hurts and to open doors to true collaboration. And as we become more practiced at giving and receiving forgiveness, so our communities begin to experience the grace and love that flows from followers of Christ to all people, and the benefit that can result from focussed, collaborative efforts. In addition, the common perceptions of Christians as judgemental, aloof, self-righteous and uninvolved can be gently and slowly changed. This same truth can be applied, of course, on the level of inter-personal relationships and ministries, as much as to inter-organisational ones.

SERMON OUTLINE

Luke 19:1-10 Zacchaeus

Chief tax-collector in a wealthy town set in a rich fertile valley - most despised & detested man in Jericho!

He had a life-changing encounter with Jesus!

1. The Chance of a lifetime:- *Jesus entered Jericho & was passing through* - on his way to Jerusalem...

the last time he would pass through Jericho..

the last time the citizens would see & hear Jesus - many made the most of the opportunity... Do we??? Z tried to..

a) his Resolve - *wanted to see who Jesus was* - but couldn't because of his lack of height... was intrigued by this charismatic character ...

b) his Resourcefulness:- *he ran ahead & climbed a sycamore tree* - 30/40 ft high with spreading branches - now had a good view - & was he in for a surprise!!!

2. The Challenge of a lifetime:- *Jesus stopped at the tree - looked up & said, "Z come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."* Spiritual point of no return for Z!

Curiosity took him up the tree; Christ brought him down!!

X challenges us to invite him into our hearts/homes..

3. The Choice of a lifetime:- will he/won't he???

He came down at once & welcomed him gladly..

"With no reserve & no delay, O Lamb of God, I come.."

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4. The Change of a lifetime:- his change in heart affected his pocket - *I give half of my possessions to the poor & if I have cheated anyone I will pay back 4 times the amount.*

Money no longer mattered... Had found greater treasure!

Today salvation has come to this house - greatest wealth!

Today we are given Chance.. face Challenge.. can make Choice.. can experience Change... eternal life/salvation..

By Norman Porteous

SERMON STARTER 1

The Gospels are full of stories about unsavoury characters who have met with Jesus in some way and instantly changed. Zaccheus was one such character. He was a collaborator, a Jew working for the invading force - the Romans - collecting taxes from rebellious and resentful Jews and adding his own cut too. Tax collectors mostly sat on the trade routes at the entrance to the city, in this case Jericho, the spot where the pickings were richest. Zaccheus was not just a tax collector, he was a 'chief tax collector' a man at the top of his profession. He had become very rich on the backs of other people and so he was a bad lot. He was rich from ill-gotten money, despised by the Jewish community for his tax collecting on behalf of the Romans and probably not even fully accepted by his Roman bosses.

Zacchaeus might have thought he was going looking for Jesus, but the end of the story makes it quite clear that Jesus was seeking Zacchaeus, the one who was lost. For his part, Zacchaeus wasn't just part of a large crowd, one of the idle curious. Crowds gather around superstars, both then and now. Paparazzi hound the rich and famous. But Luke says Zacchaeus had a different reason for being there that day he, "was seeking to see who Jesus was..." He is a model for seekers who don't get immediate satisfaction on their search, but who persist nevertheless. He is looking to see Jesus, and it turns out that Jesus was out looking for "what was lost" also.

Religious people would have presumed that Zacchaeus was not very high on God's list of important people, hardly a priority for God. Zacchaeus wasn't loveable for anything he did. God loved him because of who God is, not because of any merit on Zacchaeus' part. So, God sent Jesus out to seek and find him. Jesus has a ministry to outcasts, as it was for Zacchaeus, so it is for us. Whether we feel loveable and wonder if we have done enough for God, is not the issue in this story. What Zacchaeus found out was, though he did nothing to deserve it, Jesus had come looking for him and wanted to sit at table with him.

It may have been hard for Zacchaeus to let go of what he had gotten through his tax collecting. The job, as despicable as it was to his community, had gotten him his wealth. He couldn't have done it on his own, he couldn't have "saved" himself. It's hard to let go of an accustomed way of life, even when we are miserable with it. That is where Jesus comes in and makes the changes happen which humanly speaking seem impossible. Zaccheus was a changed man who immediately gave half of his wealth away. What a contrast with that other rich man who approached Jesus, the one who asked what he must do to inherit eternal life. When Jesus told him to give up his wealth, he went away sorrowfully (Matt. 19:16-30). Why did an encounter with Jesus produce such different reactions from these two very rich men? Perhaps it was something to do with self-knowledge. Zaccheus knew he was a bad lot. He knew he was scorned and despised by

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his fellow countrymen. He knew no self-respecting Jew would ever step near his house, let alone eat with him. And he knew why. He knew he was a cheat and a thief and a traitor to his own people. And maybe deep down inside he was ashamed. Although he could never admit that until he met Jesus.

But the rich young man had no such self-knowledge. He had no reason to feel ashamed. He thought he was OK. He was rather proud of himself, because he'd done everything he ought to do. He'd kept the law all his life, and he knew he was a good person. He'd done his best. But he was totally unaware of his own greed and desire for money, until Jesus pointed it out to him. And he was so stunned by this revelation that he was unable, at that moment at any rate, to respond to Jesus. All he could do was walk away. Jesus had harsh words for only one group of people, those who thought they were so much better than they really were. He called them hypocrites. His arguments with the Pharisees were always over the same issue. The issue of their hypocrisy. They thought they were good, and to some extent they undoubtedly were good. But they failed to realise there was badness within themselves as well as goodness.

So today the story is one of hope for us all, simply recognise our need and as we seek Jesus we will find him and his forgiveness. *Charles Royden*

SERMON STARTER 2

Things are not always what they seem! Commentary on Zacchaeus!

As the chief tax collector, Zacchaeus bid to Rome for the right to collect taxes. When Rome accepted his bid, Zacchaeus would then pay the taxes and tolls for his region in full. It was then up to him to recoup his money by collecting the taxes by the appropriate means and trying to make a profit if possible. This was often done through over-charging, cheating, charging interest, or other means. The tax collectors who collected these taxes, who would also take a cut for themselves, understandably therefore, gained a reputation for dishonesty and intimidation, especially as they had the might of the Roman Army behind them to help if necessary! However, whilst tax collecting might sound like a good number (nice work if you can get it), it appears that few tax collectors actually managed to recoup their bid and fewer still managed to make a profit. From what we can tell it would appear that Zacchaeus may be one of the few who did make a profit from this venture, although the phrase 'and was wealthy' might just mean that he had others (tax collectors) working for him as this was often a sign of wealth in the prevailing culture. But there's no doubt that Jericho was a good place to be a tax collector. It was a prospering city with many rich people who were more than content to maintain the status quo with the Romans. It was an oasis of date palms and balsam groves and exported its products all over the known world. Mark Anthony presented Jericho as a gift to Cleopatra, with Arabia thrown in. It lay along the great caravan routes, and was a centre of commercial and human activity. It was, in short, a good place to collect taxes. The stakes would be high, but the rewards could be immense. Zacchaeus was therefore probably a rich, powerful and influential individual because of his position as the Chief Tax Collector and because of his position with the Roman forces, but because of his collusion with those forces, he was despised by many people. By his very occupation many people would say that Zacchaeus had excluded himself from his people. He was a quisling who had thrown in his lot with the hated occupying power for the sake of pecuniary gain.

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But the name Zacchaeus is an interesting name for Luke to use for a tax collector. The Hebrew word from which this name is formed means clean, pure, or innocent. So it would appear that Luke is writing a story about Mr Pure, Mr Innocent the Chief Tax Collector – how strange does that sound. But is it so strange? For example, one way of interpreting ‘here and now I give half my possessions to the poor’ is that this is something which Zacchaeus is already doing. If it was something that was precipitated by his encounter with Jesus then the language in the original text would probably have used a different (aorist) tense whereas the tense that is used (present) often describes something which is repeated customary practise. So perhaps giving to the poor was something Zacchaeus already did on a regular basis. And interestingly enough, Luke often uses the notion of giving alms to signify righteousness, a theme which he picks up in the closing verses of this passage. And we could say that Zacchaeus goes even further. Jewish law demanded that if someone cheated another they had to restore the original sum with 20% interest, Roman law that demanded fourfold restitution, and even then only from a convicted criminal. Zacchaeus therefore surpasses the Torah's requirements and meets the most stringent of terms in Roman law when he declares that if it's found that he has cheated anyone, then he will compensate them.

So perhaps Luke is using this parable to emphasis Jesus' teaching that we should treat people as individuals and not judge them on some preconceived notion of what we expect them to be. Even a Chief Tax collector, like a Pharisee, can be a 'son of Abraham'. As Jesus and His disciples were moving towards Jericho Jesus has told the story of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector who went up to the temple to pray and comments that it was the tax collector who went home justified because of his actions and attitude. He's also told the story of the rich young ruler who finds it so hard to enter the Kingdom of God because of his actions and attitude – the ruler is very wealthy and Jesus asks him to sell everything he has and to give to the poor. In Zacchaeus we see a tax collector who went home justified and a rich man who was able to give generously to the poor and who has entered the Kingdom of God as Abraham's son. The passage is a reminder that Jesus looks for those who hear His word and put it into action, whatever their background; however they are perceived by society. It's not just about listening to Jesus, as many of those who followed him around the country did on a regular basis; it's about letting his teaching have an impact to change lives. Just as Isaiah condemns ritualistic piety without genuine actions so does Luke. The colours of scarlet and crimson were permanent colours, only God could change them back into pure white, as if they had never occurred. But in order for that to happen, Judah had to ensure their actions were commensurate with their words. Perhaps in the unlikely person of Zacchaeus we see an example of someone who does just that. Sam Cappleman

ONLINE SERMON SOURCES

"Doing Faith," the Rev. Ben E. Helmer, Sermons that Work, Episcopal Digital Network
<http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2013/10/19/24-pentecost-proper-26-c-2013/>

The righteous lively their faith by Susan Butterworth Susan Butterworth, a Master of Divinity candidate at Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts.
<http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2016/09/23/the-righteous-live-by-their-faith/>

[Spiritual Friendships](http://day1.org/2361-spiritual_friendships), the Rev. Glenn Ethridge, *Day 1*, 2010.
http://day1.org/2361-spiritual_friendships

[Stewardship Sermons](http://www.churchnewsireland.org), Pastor Edward F. Markquart, Grace Lutheran Church, Seattle, Washington.
www.churchnewsireland.org

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See second on list - Zaccheus

http://day1.org/2361-spiritual_friendships

CHILDREN

[Worshiping with Children](#), Ordinary 31, Including children in the congregation's worship, using the Revised Common Lectionary, Carolyn C. Brown

<http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2010/10/year-c-31st-sunday-in-ordinary-time.html>

[Story for Children's Worship and Family Activity](#), Ordinary 31, at *word-sunday.com: A Catholic Resource for the Lectionary* by Larry Broding.

<http://www.word-sunday.com/index.html>

"Big or Small - It Doesn't Matter at All," Children's Sermon from Sermons4kids.com.

<http://www.sermons4kids.com/big-or-small.html>

"In Shops or At Tea," On the Chancel Steps, children's resources by Frances Woodruff

<https://onthechancelsteps.wordpress.com/2013/10/20/tea/>