

Session IV - Luke 19:1-10, Jesus goes to Zacchaeus' home

Resources Needed:

The 5-minute video "How Can You Change Somebody's Opinion?" available at <https://youtu.be/TEWLY3mdk8E>

Copies of the notes for the next lesson either printed or sent out in advance by email to each participant.

A digital projector or large monitor and computer to view the video as a group, and a possibly wi-fi connection.

Bibles, pencils, paper

Suggested Gathering Exercise

The U.S. Centers For Disease Control states: *More than half of the people killed in car crashes were not restrained at the time of the crash. Wearing a seat belt is the most effective way to prevent death and serious injury in a crash.... Yet, about 1 in 7 people still don't buckle up.* www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/seatbeltbrief/index.html

One person had a close relative who nearly drowned in a partially submerged vehicle and thereafter refused to buckle up for fear of being trapped in a submerged vehicle even though the chances of that happening were miniscule when compared to the chances of a seat belt saving life or reducing injury in a non-water-related accident. Ask each participant to share at least one behavior or belief they or someone they know persists in despite factual evidence that contradicts or challenges that belief or behavior.

Bible Study Luke 19:1-10 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

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

Jesus is nearing the end of his journey to Jerusalem and is passing through the border town of Jericho. In Jericho there is a notorious chief tax collector named Zacchaeus who is very wealthy. Zacchaeus is short in stature and cannot see Jesus amidst the crowds who are following Jesus, so Zacchaeus climbs a tree to get an advantageous view. Jesus looks up at Zacchaeus in the tree and calls out to invite himself to the tax collector's home that night, which delights Zacchaeus and scandalizes the crowd. In those days, chief tax collectors were independent contractors who agreed to collect taxes for the foreign occupiers in return for the authorization to collect some money for themselves as well. Tax collectors dealt with Roman coins, some of which depicted the Emperor as Lord or even as God (Luke 20:19-26), and tax collectors often used intimidation or outright violence to collect taxes which were due (and often collected more than what was due). It is no wonder that the crowds following Jesus were scandalized by a spiritual teacher openly inviting himself to the home of such a sinner. Earlier in Luke's Gospel it is the penitent tax collector, not the righteous Pharisee, who returns home justified (17:14).

To understand this story we must recognize that *sight* is important; Zacchaeus, like the leper (17:15, "when he saw he was healed.") and the blind man (18:41 "Lord I want to see...") earnestly desires to and is able to *see* Jesus. Jesus, in turn, is able to see Zacchaeus and singles him out to be host. Luke is consistently concerned about wealth and the treatment of the poor. Vast areas of farmland had been taken by Herod the Great and sold to the wealthy, robbing the poor of intergenerational wealth. The crushing taxes imposed on the poor were not proportionally shared by the rich. There had been crop failures. Clearly, Jesus *sees* and notices the poor, the infirm, the poor widow, and the outcast.

The role of host in ancient Mideastern culture is empowering because it acknowledges that the host has rightful access to a place of value and meaning, and the ability to welcome others into that place. Christine Pohl writes, "An important transformation occurs when people without power or status have the opportunity to become more than guests, when they, too, can become hosts." [Christine D. Pohl, Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1999, p.121] Apparently without first confessing his sins or seeking forgiveness, Zacchaeus has been transformed by a *preemptive* gracious act of Jesus which acknowledges him as honored host in front of the entire community. As Henri Nouwen has expressed so eloquently, "poverty makes a good host." [Doubleday, New York, Henri J. Nouwen, Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life, especially chapter 6] Christ is both guest and host to us; we initially may have the sense that we are inviting the Holy into our lives and playing the role of host, but we are transformed when we recognize our poverty and discover we are already guests of the Divine. Zacchaeus goes from honored host to a grateful guest before Jesus has even entered his home, joyfully promising to repay (4x) everyone he has cheated and give away half of all he owns to the poor. This is in stark contrast to the wealthy man in Luke's previous chapter who first seeks Jesus out, but goes away saddened when Jesus tells him to give away all he owns. At that time Jesus had announced (18:25), "Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." But now Jesus announces that the impossible has been accomplished (19:9): salvation has come to this house."

+ Jesus is Jesus and we are not, but if Jesus first publicly humiliated the tax collector by accusing him of greed and corruption and demanded repentance and restoration, would that tactic be likely to result in a change of mind and heart in the tax collector?

+ If we want someone else to change their opinion, their view of reality, their way of life, what are the best tactics for us to use to accomplish that?

+ Has there been a time when you took someone into your home who was in need and found, perhaps to your surprise, that you were more blessed by that person's presence in your home than the person was? Did your guest become your host at some point, allowing you a safe and welcoming place to be with that person? As hosts we very often welcome a person to our home and listen to that person's story, but often the guest also elicits a story from us and provides a safe space for us to be ourselves. Are we hosts or guests of the Holy?

+ Is having a safe and worthy place to invite someone to share more than a mere economic issue?

Living Our Faith

Watch the 5-minute video "How Can You Change Somebody's Opinion?" at <https://youtu.be/TEWLY3mdk8E>

The following description of affordable housing myths is found on a Habitat for Humanity Website:

The need for affordable housing is a fact of life in most communities across the country, yet myths, fear, prejudice and misunderstanding often pervade the debate. The NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) mentality persists. To give a little perspective to the debate, here are seven myths and realities about affordable housing.

MYTH #1: Affordable housing drives down property values.

REALITY: Often repeated research shows conclusively that affordable housing has no negative impact on home prices, or on the speed or frequency of sale of neighboring homes. In fact, recent studies of very-low-income family housing units in Wisconsin and the Chicago area show exactly the opposite – the presence of affordable housing in a neighborhood actually had a positive impact on property values, even when they are located in affluent areas.

MYTH #2: Affordable housing looks "cheap and undesirable."

REALITY: Builders of affordable housing must comply with all the same restrictions on design and construction standards as market-rate projects. Ask a builder and they'll tell you it makes sense to use the same quality materials and techniques for every housing unit in a development. Often, because affordable housing projects frequently rely on some public money, they have to comply with additional restrictions and higher standards than market rate housing. The reality is that affordable housing is affordable because public and private funds go into making it less costly to live in, and not because it's lower quality construction.

MYTH #3: Affordable housing hurts the quality of local schools and lowers standardized test scores.

REALITY: The opposite is actually true. Without affordable housing many families become trapped in a cycle of rising rents and have to move frequently to find living space they can afford. That means their children are not able to stay in the same school for long, resulting in lower test scores on standardized tests. When a child has a stable home, and can remain in a single school systems, their test scores rise. It also means children are able to build the long-term relationships with peers, teachers, and mentors, that are key to increasing performance in elementary and secondary schools. It also increases the likelihood that children will be able to attend college. When housing disruptions are minimized, everybody wins.

MYTH #4: Affordable housing is a burden on taxpayers and municipalities.

REALITY: The reality is that affordable housing enhances local tax revenues. By improving blighted housing stock, or replacing substandard housing stock, affordable housing becomes a net plus on the tax roles. Instead of low or no payment of taxes by distressed properties, affordable housing owners actively contribute to the local economy in the taxes they pay, the money they spend in local businesses, and in how they increase property values, and revenue, in a neighborhood.

MYTH #5: Affordable housing brings increased crime.

REALITY: There are no studies that show affordable housing brings crime to neighborhoods. In fact, families who own their own homes add stability to a neighborhood and lower the crime rate. Homeownership increases neighborhood cohesion and encourages cooperation in ridding communities of criminal activity. Families who live in affordable housing seek the same thing every family does – a safe place to raise children and the opportunity to enhance the value of what they own.

MYTH #6: Affordable housing is just another government hand-out.

REALITY: It isn't the poor who benefit the most from federal housing subsidies, it's the wealthy homeowner. Homeowners receive tax deductions for mortgage interests and a similar write-off for property taxes paid. According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, in 2003 these subsidies cost the federal government \$87.8 billion, while building and subsidizing affordable housing cost only \$41.5 billion. When you factor in improvements in property values, increases in taxes paid by stable employment, enhanced revenues from a better educated populace, affordable housing provides a net gain to governments at every level.

MYTH #7: Affordable housing only benefits the very poor, everyone else pays.

REALITY: Some of the people impacted by a lack of affordable housing include employers, seniors, poor people, immigrants, low-wage or entry-level workers, firefighters, police officers, military personnel, and teachers. The lack of affordable housing means taxes revenues are not in place to improve roads, schools, or air quality. It means businesses struggle to retain qualified workers, and lowers the amount of money available to spend in those businesses. Affordable housing isn't about doing something to help the poor, it's about improving business and raising the standards of working- and middle-class families, and nation at large.

To learn more about myths and stereotypes in affordable housing, check out some of the links below, or simply look for information online. The truth is easily available to anyone willing to look.

Source: <https://www.tchabitat.org/blog/events/7-myths-about-affordable-housing-busted>

Discussion

- + Was the way the 7 myths were presented above helpful for getting people who believe the myths to change their minds; does psychological research indicate better ways?
 - + Which of the seven myths are not myths but facts to you or someone you know? How do you suppose it feels to have someone else call your belief a myth?
- Myths are not always widely held beliefs that are false; the term can also describe traditional stories which may convey truths even if they are not based on scientific facts.
- + Is it possible for: a leopard to change its spots?, a wealthy person to enter the Kingdom of God?, logic and facts to change my opinion about my own strongly held beliefs? Perhaps it is possible by the grace of God, and perhaps it is more likely if those who seek to persuade me help me to identify myself with those who hold a different opinion.
 - + If this Bible study group unanimously decided it wanted to dispel -in your community- one of the seven myths listed above, what would be the most effective means of accomplishing that goal? Spend a few minutes designing such a campaign.
 - + Is “home” merely a place where we live, or does that term have a connotation of safety, hospitality, being a reference point from which other spaces are evaluated, or of being a destination as well as a starting point?

Closing

Announce the scriptures passages and topics for the next session and distribute on paper or via email the notes and meeting details for that session.

The group may want to re-read aloud the Scriptural texts for this session, to pray together, to sing a song of blessing and benediction, or participate in some other closing activity.