

31st Sunday

I'm going to go out on a limb this morning and tell you a story about my childhood. This happened when I was about 8 years old. So a little background.. I was a child who was not gifted with athletic ability. I couldn't throw, catch, hit, toss, tackle. You name it. I couldn't do it. But I did learn the lindy when I was 5. Oh, I could swim since in the summers we lived at my grandparent's bungalow on the water in Huntington Long Island. Our bungalow was very close to our next door neighbor's where there were 5 girls in the family. We were 5 boys although the ages didn't align. I can still remember their names 60 years later. Denise, Deborah, Doreen, Dara and Didi. In between the bungalows there was a tree. Not really tall at all but for me it looked so tall, towering over me and I was terrified when Denise, Deborah, Doreen, Dara and even little Didi would taunt me, challenging me to climb the tree, Now they would scamper up and down and from the perch they would look down on me and say "bobby V can't climb a tree!" And I just wanted to run home (Well actually I was home) and hide. Thank God there was no social media in the 50s or the posts and tweets would have Bobby V can't climb a tree! Not even a Sycamore! (Actually A Sycamore is miles higher than mine)

Does anyone here know what it feels like to be made fun of, to be excluded, on the outside and not one of the "Cool" ones? How does it make you feel? Not big and tall, no small. It's that "shrinking" feeling. So if you know what it feels like to be 'different', "cast out", "looked down upon", you can put yourself in Zaccheus' sandals.

Zaccheus was hated, ridiculed, ostracized because of his occupation. And he was short too! In the social/religious milieu of his time, he was to be shunned. He was a public sinner. What Zaccheus lacked in physical stature he made up for in Fiscal Stature as a wealthy man. Yes, ill-gotten gains but what the Gehenna. No one liked him anyway.

But then there was this Jesus. He had heard that this rabbi actually ate and drank with ‘his kind’, people like Zaccheus. To see this Jesus whom he has heard so much about he’s willing to go out on a limb, make a little fool of himself and climb a tree. Since he was ridiculed and excluded anyway, it didn’t make much difference if people saw him climbing a tree. But Zaccheus gets more than a glimpse of Jesus. He receives an invitation to spend time with him. Jesus invites himself over for dinner. Now we may not really appreciate this invitation to enter Zaccheus house and dine with him. For Jesus to cross the threshold and enter his house and dine with him, Jesus was contaminating himself. He was making himself an “outsider”, one who deserved exclusion from the religious community. Jesus does that for Zaccheus. He sees the good in him and says he wants to be with him. This loving acceptance brings about a transformation in Zaccheus. He wants to share what he has with the poor and make restitution many times over to those he has taken advantage of. Pretty dramatic change! A little love and acceptance for a little guy goes a long way here.

So let me ask you this morning? How far out on a limb are you willing to go to get a glimpse of Jesus? How far out on a limb is Jesus going for you, to catch your attention, to let you know how precious and loved you are? In fact, Jesus already went out on a limb for you, well really two limbs, on the Cross. And What the Gehenna? What changes in your life can happen because of this encounter with Jesus?

If I could rewrite the story that I began with, I would rewrite it this way. After my peers had left me saying Little bobby V can’t climb a tree, Jesus would come along. He’d say something like, Hey little guy, would you like me to lift you up into that tree? And he would hoist me up and I would call out and say “hey, look at me! I’m up a tree! I just hope that someone would help me down from there!