

DATE: March 21 (Fifth Sunday of Lent)

SCRIPTURE: Luke 18:31-19:10

TITLE: Who will you invite?

Luke 18:31-19:10 Jesus heals a blind man and meets Zacchaeus

Once again, the Narrative Lectionary pairs two stories that are usually kept separate. The setting of these stories is an important part of what is happening. In the first part, Jesus is entering Jericho and meets a blind man at the city gate. In the second part, Jesus is passing through Jericho and meets a tax collector named Zacchaeus.

Jesus is passing through Jericho on his way to Jerusalem. He has told his followers that in Jerusalem he is going to be arrested, tortured, and murdered. Immediately after this prediction he comes upon these two men—and by holding the stories together we realize that this is a story of two men who want to see, but are blocked by the crowds.

First, the blind man shouts “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me,” and the people try to quiet him down. Why would they do such a thing? This is Jericho on the eve of the Passover celebration. Jericho is a city that has deep roots in the history of Israel. Jericho was where Joshua’s army first entered the Promised Land. It was the victory at Jericho that led the Hebrews into the land that would become united under David’s rule.

The man calling Jesus “Son of David” was conjuring deep nationalist pride. Here, in the city of victory he was calling Jesus a King. This is dangerous talk. Jericho had a king. It was Herod, and he was King because Rome said he could be. The Emperor was the ultimate King, not this “Son of David.” Speaking anything different was treason—punishable by death. Death on a cross.

Yet Jesus hears the man, and finds out that the man simply wants to see. The blind man saw more clearly than the crowds that wanted to shush him. Jesus grants him sight, and continues into the city.

There, he meets Zacchaeus, another man who wanted to see. Zacchaeus climbs a tree to see Jesus because,



Zacchaeus in Jericho, within the Romanian Church in Jericho, Israel. Photo found at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dnwinterburn/8668690913/>

much like the blind man, the people crowd him out. Yet Zacchaeus defends himself. Your Bible may say that Zacchaeus tells Jesus that he “will give half his wealth to the poor.” That however, is a bad translation of the Greek. The tense does not reflect the word “will.” Zacchaeus says, “I give half of my wealth.” This is not a promise of a future change of heart. This is Zacchaeus describing what he already does. This is not the story of Zacchaeus’s conversion. This is the story of the crowd keeping a son of Abraham out of God’s family, and Jesus inviting him back in.

Twice the people try to exclude someone from Jesus’ presence. The blind man is hushed. The tax collector is forced up a tree. Jesus, on his way to his own arrest and murder takes the time to welcome these two into his fold.

Jesus invites them to take their place in the family of God. We are called to do the same. We are a people of invitation. Too often the church acts as the crowds, pushing the inconvenient out of the way. Instead, we should be always inviting others to be a part of God’s family. We are all, as Jesus says, children of Abraham.