

### The shushers and grumblers

Sermon by Robb McCoy

At first reading, it is easy to think that this story is about two men whose lives are changed. The blind man receives sight and Zacchaeus changes his heart and stops being a corrupt tax collector. To focus on these two men however, misses the point. To unlock the meaning of his passage, you need to widen your focus and include the ones on the periphery. This passage is about the shushers and the grumblers. The blind man could see all along, and Zacchaeus was already a child of Abraham. It is to those who would get in-between people and Jesus that we should pay attention.

Both stories take place in Jericho. This was a place where Judean resistance was strong, where stories of the walls tumbling down before Joshua were still told. It was also the site of one of Herod the Great's most fabulous palaces and strongholds. On the eve of Passover, the deep sense of Jewish pride would have had the tensions with Roman occupiers at a simmer.

Enter Jesus. This whole passage is a prequel to next Sunday's larger procession into Jerusalem. Many of the elements here will be found next week too, including the shushers and the grumblers. The shushers appear first, trying to quiet the blind man. He hears the crowd coming, learns that it is Jesus of Nazareth, and then he makes the bold, audacious, and treasonous shout, "Son of David! Show me mercy!"

Then, those leading the procession tried to quiet him. They were afraid of such a brazen shout. "Son of David" was not just about Jesus' lineage. It was a claim on Kingship. It was a reminder that Herod, the puppet king usurper, was not a son of David and not a legitimate ruler. This was dangerous, so they tried to shush him. His response was to shout again even louder.

In the throngs of disciples that were following Jesus, it was the blind man who saw Jesus for who he was. His healing was secondary. He already saw clearly.

Then, as they passed through town they found Zacchaeus, who was blocked by the crowds. He climbed into the tree to see, but what we find is that he already understood Jesus's path. This is not the story of

*This sycamore tree in Jericho is known as the "Zacchaeus Tree." While there is no proof it was the tree of this story, it was probably alive in Jesus' day.*



Zacchaeus changing his ways. The future tense does not belong in the story. Read the CEB version and you see, "I give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anyone, I repay them four times as much." This is the way that John the Baptist already laid out for tax collectors (Luke 3:12-13).

It was the grumblers who tried to keep Zacchaeus from the table because they are ready to judge him. The shushers wanted to quiet the blind man because he could upset the Roman system too much. The grumblers wanted to exclude Zach because he participated in the Roman system too much. Shushers and grumblers are never happy, and too many Christian still play these roles.

When black people in American rose up and started to complain about their conditions under Jim Crow and unfair practices, it was the Church that often tried to shush them.

When LGBTQ people started to show up in places of faith and say like Zach, "I'm already following you," it was the Church that wanted to exclude them from the table.

Whenever there are shushers trying to quiet the cries of injustice; and whenever there are grumblers trying to exclude others from the table; Jesus interrupts everything and says, "Look, I see you! I am coming to your house."

So church, I ask you, is Jesus in the house today? In the midst of your cries, in the midst of your struggle, in the midst of others trying to get in they way, I am here to tell you, "Jesus sees you. And Jesus is in this house today." So don't be a grumbler or a shusher. Don't block people from Jesus. Don't shush cries for mercy. Jesus is in this house, and today we will be called children of God.