

Lent 3
"Trust Found"
Luke 19:1-27

Dear friends,

The reading: **"He entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. 3 And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. 4 So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. 5 And 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 and came down and received him joyfully. 7 And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." 8 And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." 9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."**

11 As they heard these things, he proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately. 12 He said therefore, "A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. 13 Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Engage in business until I come.' 14 But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.' 15 When he returned, having received the kingdom, he ordered these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by doing business. 16 The first came before him, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.' 17 And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.' 18 And the second came, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made five minas.' 19 And he said to him, 'And you are to be over five cities.' 20 Then another came, saying, 'Lord, here is your mina, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief; 21 for I was afraid of you, because you are a severe man. You take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.' 22 He said to him, 'I will condemn you with your own words, you wicked servant! You knew that I was a severe man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow? 23 Why then did you not put my money in the bank, and at my coming I might have collected it with interest?' 24 And he said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas.' 25 And they said to him, 'Lord, he has ten minas!' 26 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. 27 But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me.'"

This is a long reading, but I have kept it in full because, like many of the parables I'll be showing you in the coming weeks, who Jesus tells it to helps us understand what it means. Jesus, as you can see, tells this parable to the folks who are gathering with Him in Zacchaeus' house, as Zacchaeus is impressively demonstrating his repentance. The questions I want you to ask are as follows. Why does Jesus tell this parable in a setting where something good seems to be happening? Why such a dark and seemingly harsh ending? And finally, how are we to be good servants instead of bad servants?

Jesus meets Zacchaeus the tax collector and goes to his house to eat. This is something Jesus does a lot, and He does it precisely for the reasons that He says. He comes to seek and and save the lost. The crowds who saw this didn't approve. Zacchaeus was a traitor at the very least, making a buck off his countrymen at the behest of their Roman conquerors. Jesus doesn't seem to care, and by that not caring He reminds us again that being lost, being sinful, is the true problem. Things like treason, usury, and deviant behavior are just symptoms of that sin. So far, so very straightforward and pleasingly Lutheran.

It is in this setting that Luke records something odd: **“11 As they heard these things, he proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately.”** So Jesus perceives that they have missed the point. It wasn't a question of timing, it was a question of what “kingdom of God” is. We know, from the benefit of the rest of the Scriptures, that the kingdom of God is not a place on this earth. It is not a nation in the sense that we understand them. The kingdom of God is the description God gives to all those who believe His promises. So the kingdom of God is Jews who trust God. The kingdom of God is Gentiles who trust God. It is you, it is me, our grandparents, their ancestors, everyone throughout time who trusts what God says. And what does God say? God tells us that Jesus is His beloved Son, here to redeem us from our sins, and we should listen to Him.

Faith is the issue in question here. The people Jesus is speaking to are thinking superficially, they're just thinking of earthly nations, nationalities, and outward behavior. They think that God's children look and act a certain way, they come from certain families, that sort of thing. We do this all the time. We categorize people, usually in pretty sloppy ways, based on how they seem to us. Faith, though, is what makes a child of God. Trust. Belief. That is why Jesus tells this parable the way He tells it, and this is why this parable takes some of the turns it does.

Luke adds some details that the other Gospel writers don't. He tells us that the ruler in this parable is not well-loved, to put it mildly. He is going to inherit a kingdom then return. This guy, rich as he was, noble that he was, was about to get richer and few are pleased with this thought. Think of how you feel

when you read a news article about some incredibly overpaid company CEO getting some kind of ridiculous bonus. It's that kind of thing. God does not distribute wealth equally, and in this sinful world the natural result is that kind of horrid inequality, but that is not the point. The point is that there is a natural resentment of this ruler from the start, an exact mirror of our natural resentment of God.

The ruler appoints a series of servants to do business until he gets back. One does well. The other does less well. The final one doesn't do anything. This is where it gets hard to follow for a Christian. God is not a businessman, and God is not concerned with profit margin. Our God is in the business of souls, salvation, compassion. So why does Jesus put it this way? Remember His audience. These are people that think the kingdom of God is about being properly Jewish, upright, and most of all, not at all like Zacchaeus. They think if they are Jewish enough, upright enough, that God will make the kingdom of God come to them. Business.

Paganism, I have told you before, is sickeningly and glaringly capitalistic. That is to say, if you are a pagan, you do business with God. You sacrifice so many bulls to grease the wheels so the god of your choice will do what you want him to do. Jews, at this point, are pagans, because they have rejected Jesus as God's Son. The God they worship is no longer the true God. Jesus is trying to show them this. The true God is not, and has *never been*, about business. He doesn't work by give and take. If God were about give and take, we would all be done for, because none of us could ever give enough. Sin deducts too much from our account simply by virtue of being evil. We outpace whatever good we do with the evil that we simply are.

Notice that the amount doesn't matter at all to the ruler. Again, God is not in business. He doesn't care that much about what we do with the promises He gives us. He just wants us to trust them and use them according to our abilities. He wants you to trust that Jesus has died to make your sins go away. He wants you to trust that this same Jesus is with you in the words that He shares with you, the Bible you read. He wants you to trust that when you die that same Jesus will be with you and carry you to the next life. He wants you to take that trust and to use it to do good things for your neighbor. That's it.

That is what the last servant did not understand. He did not understand the trust that his master

placed in him, and most importantly, he didn't return that trust. He thought his master was a jerk, and so he hid away what was given to him and returned it. You can almost hear the resentment in his voice as he gives his speech. Here, take your mina, I didn't want it anyway, you scare me, now go away. The last servant is one who doesn't believe in God, who doesn't trust God, who doesn't like God, and who wants God to leave Him alone. That is what God condemns, and that is the enemy that God slaughters.

So where does that leave you, dear saints? Well, I remind you that you are not that last servant. You know God. If you're anything like me, you occasionally resent Him, you want Him out sometimes, but you always return to that trust. You know God. He has taken you through thick and thin. He has been with you years or decades. He has seen you through valleys and mountains both. He has told you that you are a sinner and He has made sure you can be cleansed from that sin. He has given you His gifts freely. Cultivate that trust. In the face of so much fear, trust is so important, and trust in God is most important. Remind yourself and the devil that the Lord has promised never to leave you nor forsake you. He is with you always 'till the end of the age. Believe God's promises, and God tells you that you are a good servant indeed. That's what Zacchaeus did that the onlookers didn't seem to catch. Zacchaeus believed Jesus, and that is what made Zacchaeus repent, and that is what pleased Jesus.

Trust is hard to come by these days. We are surrounded by lies, but we have the truth, and the truth sets us free to trust that God is with us. The truth sets us free from fear for our future. Our faith is the trust that God has cultivated in us, and that we cultivate by reminding ourselves of the promises that God gives us.

Jesus loves you. Trust that, even if nothing else makes sense.

Amen.