



Welcome the Outcast

Luke 19:1-10

"Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."

All the people saw this and began to mutter,

"He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord!

Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor,

and if I have cheated anybody out of anything,

I will pay back four times the amount."

Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house,

because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

October 30, 2016

Thoughts for the Week

Jesus and the Social Outcasts and Bottom Dwellers

A young woman—having come from an unbelievably sad and horrible background (which included two out-of-wedlock children by the time she was fifteen years old) sat in prison, awaiting trial for having murdered a social worker who had come to take away her baby, the only person from whom she ever felt any love.

Without mother, father, husband, any relative, or even a friend, she faced the forbidding future alone. Through the visits of a pastor, however, this hopeless young woman learned that, despite all the mistakes, despite the desperateness of the situation, and despite whatever loomed on the horizon, Christ loved and forgave her. No matter how society viewed this young girl, she knew, for herself, God's eternal love. This social outcast discovered meaning and purpose in her Lord, whose love and acceptance transcended all of society's norms and mores, even the *good* ones.

Societies establish hierarchies. Wealthy or well-educated people usually acquire the highest positions. Good moral citizens, the "ordinary" people, normally occupy the middle rungs on the social ladder. That leaves the bottom dwellers, those such as prostitutes, substance abusers, criminals, the homeless, and others. During Christ's time, that list also included lepers and tax collectors.

What happened that propelled the social outcasts ahead of the self-righteous? What did the bottom dwellers discover that the social elite often missed? Why was Jesus apparently more effective in reaching the bottom strata than He was with the upper echelons?

Although hardened by sinful pleasures, and sometimes encased in self-constructed tough exteriors, the social outcasts were, and still are, easier to reach than the prideful,

haughty, and self-righteous elite. Often, beneath the outcasts' bravado lies emotional emptiness characterized by poor self-worth. Frequently, especially during the teenage years, such people openly rebel, frantically trying to establish a personal identity to compensate for the insecurities felt within. That identity is, purposefully, established in opposition to the wishes of whoever serves as the authority figure (often parents) for that person.

Jesus didn't waste any time trying to damage their already diminished sense of self-worth. Instead, He created a renewed sense of personal value. He established that foundation by consistently loving and accepting the outcasts, whose hearts were often melted by the warm and loving receptions that they had received from Christ.

What is your own attitude toward those whom your society deems to be social outcasts? Be honest: in a lot of cases, don't you feel a certain sense of superiority? If so, dwell on the implications of those feelings.

Prayer Thought – Madagascar

As we enter into a time of guided prayer, meditation, and musical reflection, you are invited to offer silent prayers or meditate during the moments of quiet. The Prayers of the People begin with individuals and groups, and then move out from this Temple of Peace to include the human family and the planet.

Allow yourself to come reverently into the presence of the Divine. Transformative encounters await you here with the Eternal Creator and Reconciler.

Creator God, cleanse our hearts. Accept the confession of our flaws and failures, and make us whole. Transform us, O God, into the persons of peace and grace you created us to be.

Redeeming God, bring to our awareness those persons and relationships that are broken, and make us conscious of the need for reconciliation and forgiveness. Transform us for relationships of wholeness once again.

Saving God, allow us to feel your love and concern for your children in communities around the world, both far and near including Madagascar, the country for which we pray this day. May we weep with your tears and act with compassion to heal your people from needless suffering.

God of all creation, stir within us a deep connection with everything you have created; make us aware of the sacred nature of all that surrounds us and lead us into deep reverence that cultivates nurturing actions.

May these prayers of concern, compassion, and transformation for ourselves, others, all people, and the earth, lead us into a world shaped by your unconditional love, O God, Amen.

Stewardship Thought

When Zacchaeus encountered Jesus, and the sin of his ways, he repented. He also committed to give to the poor. Faith transformations like his have a way of making us

mortals reorder our priorities, especially when it comes to our financial lives. Is Jesus Christ making a difference in your life? Have you experienced amazing grace and acceptance from God? Does your commitment to supporting the work of Christ and Christ's church show it?