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## **Peculiar Saints**

Pentecost 23, c, Nov. 4, 2007

Luke 19:1-10

It is hard to describe the beauty of Jericho. You get here from any direction only by miles of dust and sand, hours of thirst and heat. My Jericho is a hole in the furnace of a desert, nourished by a spring of the purest water that ever saved a parched soul.

It is my Jericho. Mine. I have it in my hands, almost to do with as I wish. Everyone here fears me! For I have the authority to demand of them all tribute for Caesar! Taxes to go to Rome... and, yes, a hefty portion for me, too!

Now, don't get wrong. I'm not a Roman. I don't even like the Romans, except that they are the vehicle for my riches. I've worked my way up through the ranks of the tax collectors. Had to prove I could squeeze water from stones... taxes from stoney fisted shopkeepers in Beer Sheba. I got them to pay! The Romans were happy. And so WAS I.

Jericho is my plum! My reward. Here it is, a great crossroads of the world. Traders heading anywhere important near here tread the road right here past the spring of Jericho. And when they come past me, they pay their toll alright! I see to that!

It makes me no friends. But who needs friends? It makes me an outcast from the synagogue. But who wants this place anyway?

Do you believe that they have discovered the only way to God? Do you believe that you have to honor every little law about what eat and what to wear? Does God really care about all that?

When I look out over the fierce desert,  
when I remember how our people formed into a nation as we journeyed from Egypt in it for those 40 yrs.;

when I remember the way God was made known to us in the manna and the quails, the water in the midst of the sands, exactly when we most needed it...

I see a God whose more powerful, more awesome, than the little minds of those folks over there in the synagogue! These Jews haven't cornered the market on God..... at least most haven't.

(pause)

OK... I'm troubled. But you would be, too, if you'd seem what I just saw.

There was the son of Timaeus out by the road, begging again, the good for nothing sinner. At least God hasn't blinded me for my sins, like he was blinded. Timmaeus Jr. hears that Jesus is coming by, starts his caterwauling, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Won't shut up either, even when the others demanded he quiet down.

This Jesus asked him: "What do you want me to do for you?" Timaeus's kid said, "Lord, let me see again." Then this Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has saved you."

(pause)

You know what? He did! Blind as bat this morning, and now singing the praise of Jesus cause he can see.

How'd Jesus do that? How did he make a blind fellow SEE again??!!

I'm puzzled....

Wait a minute, the crowds are gathering....

Narrator:

*Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way.*

Move over kid! Don't you know who I am? Give me space here or I'll see to that your father doesn't have a coin left in his pocket. You hear?

Geez, got a rip in this fine tunic. I spent a fortune on the thing, and I'm ruining it just to get a better seat for the show.

Here I am climbing this old tree to see this Jesus, like **I'm** some sort of kid.

*(pause)*

But- you know- at least here, the townspeople won't spit on me or taunt me. And from way up here I can get a good peek at this miracle worker without worrying about him yelling at me, "sinner!," like all the religious fanatics do. He'll never even know I'm here.

Now don't get me wrong. I'm not against God. I pray every day. But these folks here think that they've got God all to themselves and think that they've got God all figured out. I'm not their kind of saint, I'm a bit peculiar - but at least I don't pretend that I know all there is to know about God and what God wants. God's bigger than us. That much I do know.

To tell you the truth, if it weren't for God to talk to sometimes, I'd be absolutely crazy by now. I get so lonely. I don't have any friends. The religious people say that I'm unclean because of the job that I do. They can't see that if I didn't do this job, somebody else would just have to do it.

This is the system folks. I didn't make it! And I don't know how to change it.

The only people who call me friend are those who are trying to side up to me for money or favors or special treatment. Don't think the life of a tax collector is a joy ride.

I'm telling you kid, move off to that other limb, cause I'm crawling further out this one. Don't you give me any lip, you little...

You know I heard that this Jesus not only does all kinds of miracles, but that he claims to speak for God – not like those fierce prophets – but saying God loves ALL of us.... wants to forgive us and bless us. People don't talk much about it because it seems too good to be true. But I don't think God has to be hard and gruff and punishing. Maybe Jesus could be right. Wouldn't it be **great** if he was? You know, if God were... forgiving. Why someone... even someone like me, could have a second chance to get things right.

Geez, sometimes I'm such a dreamer.

Narrator: *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." So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner."*

MY house? Why in the world would he want to come to MY house? I didn't understand and I STILL don't understand. But one thing I've learned from the school of hard knocks is grab an opportunity when you've got it!

If Jesus came to you, you'd invite him in, right?

I haven't felt like this since I was a little kid! When mom and dad named me, "innocent one," Zacchaeus, they must have thought I'd be pure ... a good guy. Up to now, I haven't been good for anyone but the Romans.

Then Jesus came to my house. He told me that God is a God of second chances; that I can wake up from this nightmare of life that I've created; that God can use – even me- for good purposes that I'd never imagined.

“Innocent One.” For years I've made my name, one big joke. But now I am innocent again. Right now, I feel new. I feel clean! I feel – for the first time in a long, long time- I feel free!

I'm absolutely giddy, and I don't even care what it costs me, if I can just make this feeling last. Jesus has turned me right side up for the first time in a long time, and I'm going to do whatever I can to keep his ideas, his promises, his challenge right here before me!

Jesus, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much."

Jesus, I just want this New Life you are talking about. I don't need a miracle like Timmaeus. I just need to see in your eyes that God really does welcome me back. If your right.... if that's the way that it really is.... then I'm with you, no matter what.

*Narrator: Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."*

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