

“Let Faith Arise—Part 5”  
October 30, 2016  
Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost  
Text: Luke 19:1-10

Island Heights UMC, Island Heights, NJ

*He 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.*

*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."*

*Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "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."*

*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."*

### Introduction

Today we conclude our series called “Let Faith Arise.” The series started at the beginning of October when we heard that faith, even faith the size of the small mustard seed will see the impossible come to pass; that faith is related to our healing and that God’s desire is for us to be made whole; that faith is fed by a life of steady prayer; and that faith endures and sustains us like runners in a race who are fighting the good fight. It has been our goal to learn more about faith, and for our faith itself to be stirred up.

Today we hear a well-known story from the Gospel of Luke about a man who climbs up a tree to get a better look at Jesus, and comes down the tree a changed man. Someone who experiences what could be called the *Jesus Effect*.

### Jericho

The setting is Jericho. An ancient city. An Old Testament city—if you remember the story of the Walls of Jericho that came tumbling down. It’s a strategically positioned city known for its regional trade. And it’s where this New Testament story—which you will only find in the Gospel of Luke—takes place. It begins,

*Jesus enters Jericho and is passing through it.*

Jericho is seventeen miles east of Jerusalem, and 3600 feet lower in terms of elevation. This is why we hear the expression in the gospels “Going up to Jerusalem.” Soon Jesus would go up to Jerusalem for the last time, where he would be captured, tortured, and crucified. But on this day he is in Jericho; and there is going to be an encounter.

*There is a man there named Zacchaeus; he is a chief tax collector and he is rich.*

He is a traitor to his own people. He works for the Empire, and exacts revenue through taxes from his fellow Jews. He grabs as much as he can, and then pockets whatever is possible after paying Rome. It’s Jericho, and there is money to be made. Wealth is built on greed in a town like Jericho. And someone like Zacchaeus has found a way, if he hasn’t indeed sold his soul, to make it big.

### The Encounter

On this day there is a buzz in Jericho. They have heard about him. Word is spreading and there is a crowd in the city that has heard about Jesus.

*Zacchaeus is trying to see who Jesus is, but on account of the crowd he cannot, because, as Luke describes, he is short in stature.*

*So he runs ahead and climbs a sycamore tree to see him, because he is going to pass that way.* This is not the sycamore tree that we are familiar with; this would be the sycamore fig tree found only in Palestine, which grows 40-60 ft. high. And its low hanging bottom branches make it a great climbing tree. So up the tree Zacchaeus goes.

And then, the encounter. And the unexpected happens.

*When Jesus comes to the place, he looks up and says to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today."*

*So he hurries down and is happy to welcome him.* It is the *Jesus Effect*, and it has gotten hold of Zacchaeus.

### The Grumblers

But do you hear the grumbles? Grumble, grumble, grumble. Not everyone is happy about this Jesus and Zacchaeus encounter. There are the grumblers. Do you know any grumblers? They are always there. Sometimes it’s us. You know how we get. We can be cynical, offended, and angry. This is the *Jesus Effect* on those who find the gift of faith through grace a scandal. How could a tax collector get this much attention and favor? Further proof that this Jesus is no good. Just look at the company he keeps.

*All who see it, Luke writes, begin to grumble and say, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner."*

“*This is the Messiah? This maverick from Nazareth is the Son of God? And he keeps company with people like this? This tax collector?*” It is thought there were some fifteen thousand Pharisees and Levitical priests living in Jericho at the time—devout religious men. And yet, the heck with the grumblers, Jesus is drawn to the hated runt up in the tree.

### The Redemption

Redemption. This is what Jesus does. And these are the kind of people he is willing to go to and spend time with in their homes. He goes to places others will not go, doing what others will not do.

A changed Zacchaeus now stands and says, *"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."*

This is repentance. This is someone whose life is suddenly and completely turned around 180 degrees. This is redemption—a life renewed. This is the *Jesus Effect*.

*Then Jesus says to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham."*

The words we all want to hear! This is the good news: to be brought back into the family of Abraham, the ancient father of our faith. The chronic, lonely, spiritual pain of being removed from this family is unbearable. But when Jesus, the very incarnation of God, enters in and pronounces the reuniting of a wayward child to the family, it's time to celebrate, because faith has been restored!

As one biblical scholar points out, the Hebrew name Zacchaeus means "pure." And remember when Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount he said, *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."*

Things began to turn around for Zacchaeus the moment he heard Jesus was in Jericho. That is when faith entered him. Zacchaeus ran ahead and climbed a tree to get a better look at him. That little mustard seed faith was already operating in his heart, and he wanted to see God. Jesus knew as soon as he saw him in the tree that something was happening. But it wouldn't end there. There was going to be a healing. Zacchaeus was going to be made whole, and he was going to be returned to community, no matter what the grumblers said. Which is why Luke puts an exclamation point on this story saying,

*"The Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."*

### Let Faith Arise!

In this series we have been hearing the phrase "Let Faith Arise!" Our faith comes to us as a gift. It gets in us before we even know what is going on. When the Spirit of God is moving faith begins to work its way into entire communities, and before you know it, there is a revival going on. It's the *Jesus Effect!* To witness a community growing in faith is to witness a joyous miracle.

Earlier Pat read from a letter from Paul to the faith community in Thessalonica that expresses this joy. Imagine it's a letter to the faith community of Island Heights:

*"We must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of everyone of you for one another is increasing."*

*To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfill by his power every good resolve and work of faith, so that the*

*name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

We had our annual charge conference yesterday and besides the normal business items we are compelled to do as a local church, we also reflected on where we are as a faith community, and where we are going in the coming year. So, as we set our minds for continuing ministry, let your faith arise! Let your faith, even if only the size of a mustard seed, arise! Let the faith, which believes all kinds of healing is God’s desire for your life, arise! Let the faith, which is fueled by a life of ongoing prayer, arise! Fight the good fight, run the race, and keep that faith! And in all you do, remember that God enters the human race as Jesus and seeks out redeeming encounters with the lost. By faith through God’s grace, we have all been counted in that number. As you share the good news, let *that* faith arise. Amen.