

**“JOY!”**

**Sunday, October 30, 2016**  
**22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**



**(Luke 19:1-10, NRSV)**

## **Jesus and Zacchaeus**

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.”*

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

***Thanks be to God.***

**[2<sup>nd</sup> Service: Affirmation of Faith]**

**[MESSAGE]**

Last year Disney/Pixar Studios released an animated movie called *"Inside Out."*

It offered us an imaginative look inside our brains and how emotions might be in control more than we care to admit.

We met "Anger" and "Fear" and "Sadness" and "Disgust" – But, my favorite of the emotional imps was *"Joy"*.

She found ways to make everything better in bad times and pulled all the other emotions together to work through difficult challenges.

Joy, it seems, is the solution to a multitude of problems in life.

"**Joy**" is a fun word to say...It just makes you happy to say it...***JOY!***

But I wonder, where does our joy come from; what brings joy into our lives?

Today's gospel is a story about joy and how we might find joy in the midst of challenging circumstances.

**Let us pray**...Lord, help us to find our joy in you every day. Speak to us now through the life of Jesus. Amen.

Webster's dictionary says JOY means:

- 1) to experience great pleasure or delight:  
REJOICE;

2) the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires: DELIGHT

It seems to me that Mr. Webster only scratches the surface of what "*joy*" truly means; where is God in this definition?

There are many ways to define joy.

Joy isn't just a smile or a laugh.

Joy is something that is deep within and doesn't leave quickly.

When we have the joy of the Lord, we'll know it and so will others.

Since joy is given by God and something that He wants us to have, we need to be joyful!

In addition to *being* joyful, we should let others have their joy and not bring them down when they are excited about good things.

The only thing worse than not having joy is stealing someone else's.

Christians should always find reasons to be joyful.

If you cannot find ways to be joyful then your perspective needs to change.

God offers us opportunities for joy through the blessings he pours out on us every day.

Yet, we may have trouble feeling the joy in the midst of whatever else is going on in our lives.

Let's look at the story of Zacchaeus again to see why it is a story about joy.

Zack is in a really tough spot.

He isn't just any old tax collector; he's the *chief* tax collector.

In this position, he is particularly hated by his neighbors.

He is, first and foremost, a Jew and the people view his job as a betrayal...He is working for the occupying Roman forces and collecting taxes from his own people.

Add to that the reputation that the chief tax collectors are getting richer through corrupt practices and over-collection.

Then you consider that Zack is a little guy and people like to make fun of him and make things difficult for him because of his size.

All in all, Zack is an outcast in his own community. So, let's think of him as representing **anyone** who feels left out or looked down upon or rejected by his friends and neighbors.

This is the guy who Jesus chooses to offer his grace to by looking him in the eye and inviting himself to come into his house for dinner.

Zack is so overjoyed by this blessing that he promises to be a better person, to give all his ill-gotten gains back to the people - four times over! - AND sell half of everything and give it to the poor.

Zacchaeus' joy is so overwhelming that it completely changes his life.

That is the joy we hear about over and over again in the Bible - Joy that comes out of doing what God wants us to do and Joy that completely changes us.

It is important that we notice how Zacchaeus got himself into the right position in that tree.

Obviously he had heard something about this Jesus who was passing through town; he must've had some clue as to the kind of man Jesus was.

Apparently he tried hard to get a look at Jesus but the people seemed to block him at every turn - just one more chance for the folks in town to put Zack down for his size and his shortcomings as their enemy.

So Zack got tired of being pushed aside and looking at the backside of the people who stood in his way from seeing Jesus.

So he took action...he ran around the crowd and climbed up a tree to get a glimpse of Jesus as he passed by.

He made the choice to go out of his way to seek Jesus and his efforts paid off.

That may also be part of the reason for his great joy.

The joy we seek, the joy we long for comes from a deep commitment to be Christ-like.

Great joy grows out of the choices we make to say yes to the invitation of Jesus.

Making choices is hard.

It involves weighing all of our options and making value judgements about those options.

We must consider how each option might affect our well-being and our future; we must also consider how each option might affect others who may be involved.

Ultimately, the choices we make are also deeply affected by our state of mind at the time; this is a spiritual state of contentment or distress; consolation or desolation.

I want to share with you about a recent conversation I had with one of my spiritual advisors.

Throughout our lives we move from moments when we feel particularly close to God to those times when



we feel so far from God that we fear we have been abandoned.

The choices we make are influenced by where we are within this spiritual movement.

Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuit order of priests, talks about this spiritual movement and suggests that we should seek a balance in the rhythm of movement between these two extremes.

**Spiritual consolation** is an experience of being so on fire with God's love that we feel impelled to praise, love, and serve God and help others as best as we can.

Spiritual consolation encourages and facilitates a deep sense of gratitude for God's faithfulness, mercy, and companionship in our life.

In consolation, we feel more alive and connected to others.

**Spiritual desolation**, in contrast, is an experience of the soul in heavy darkness or turmoil.

We are assaulted by all sorts of doubts, bombarded by temptations, and mired in self-preoccupations.

We are excessively restless and anxious and feel cut off from others.

Such feelings, in Ignatius's words, "*move one toward lack of faith and leave one without hope and without love.*"

The key question in interpreting consolation and desolation is: *where is the movement coming from and where is it leading me?*

Spiritual consolation does not always mean happiness.

Spiritual desolation does not always mean sadness.

Sometimes an experience of sadness is a moment of conversion and intimacy with God.

Times of human suffering can be moments of great grace.

Similarly, peace or happiness can be illusory if these feelings are helping us avoid changes we need to make.

As we talked about this rhythm of consolation and desolation, we began to realize that the product of pursuing a balanced rhythm can, in fact, be JOY.

When we are closest to God and experiencing great happiness, joy is easy to notice.

When we are furthest from God, joy comes from the memories we have of God's faithfulness in previous hard times.

Either way, joy is a common factor that allows us to experience God's grace no matter where we are or what choices we have to make.

Philippians 4:4 says, "*Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!*"

Romans 12:15 says, "*Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.*"

Zacchaeus begins this story in a place of desolation – far from God, beaten down by his community.

He makes the choice to seek Jesus and moves to a place of consolation – overjoyed by his encounter with Jesus and prompted to completely transform his life.

In the future, Zacchaeus will remember this rhythm of movement and be able to experience God's joy even when things don't go his way.

**“JOY”** – It really is a fun word to say, isn't it.

I believe that's because it reminds us of God's faithfulness.

Our joy fills us up when we feel empty and overflows when we're doing well.

Our joy comes from God, not from anything this world has to offer.

We can and should recognize this joy at all times, no matter what is happening in our lives today that threatens to steal our joy.

In John 16:22, Jesus said: *“So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again; then you will rejoice, and no one can rob you of that joy.”*

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the  
Holy Spirit. **Amen.**