

## **Wednesday in Trinity 16 Week, Year C**

*Luke 19.1-27*

Once again Jesus finds himself relaxing in the company of the ‘wrong’ sort of people – this time the hated tax-collector Zacchaeus. And once again the crowds begin to grumble. But this time, instead of Jesus telling them a parable, Zacchaeus speaks to him in public and gives evidence of his extravagant repentance. But it’s not just a change of heart. Zacchaeus intends to restore and make amends. He is determined to do it lavishly. He doesn’t offer to sell all his property, nor does Jesus demand it, but by the time he’d given half of it away, and made fourfold restitution where necessary, he’d be living in seriously reduced circumstances.

He doesn’t care. He’s found something more valuable. ‘Today I have to stay at your house’ becomes ‘Today salvation has come to this house’; where Jesus is, salvation is to be found, for those who accept him as master and reorder their lives accordingly. Once more, an outcast is linked back to the true family of Abraham. In this, Zacchaeus is the opposite of the ruler from last week. The ruler loved money. Zacchaeus loved God. The ruler held on to his possessions. Zacchaeus is prepared to give them up. But he’s not going to follow Jesus on the road to Jerusalem, escaping the hatred of his neighbours. He’s going to live out his new life and re-establish himself as part of the renewed Israel right where he is.

But the ministry of Jesus continues. Now as the crowd, amazed at what they’d seen in front of them in Zacchaeus, stood around Jesus, he tells them the parable about the king returning to his kingdom. Often this parable has been treated as a picture of what the final judgment will be. Yet the parable is about something happening much closer to Jesus’ own day. Within the world of first-century Judaism, a story about a king and his servants would naturally be heard as a story about God and Israel. How should we interpret the parable then? The answer is this: God has returned to Israel to take account and to judge his servants. Jesus has been warning for the past ten chapters, that judgment will fall on the nation, the city and the Temple itself, if they don’t finally heed

his call. God himself has come and the servant who has hidden his master's money will be found out.

The darkest strand in the parable is those who don't want this man to be their king. But now, Jesus is implying that the unwanted King is coming back: not another wicked Herod but the true King, the King who comes with the message of grace and peace, the King who was rejected because his people wanted to keep the kingdom for themselves.

The parable says three things. First, God's kingdom has come with judgment as well as mercy. Second, it indicates that as Jesus arrives in Jerusalem, that the city is already rejecting his message, God's judgment is being prepared. If the city can't receive the announcement of the kingdom, no more can be done. Third, it brings together in a dramatic way Jesus' own journey and the return of God himself, and thus unveils the hidden secret inside so much of the gospel story. Jesus is not speaking about God, God's kingdom, God's return to Zion. Jesus is embodying it. Concealed within his own mission is another: Israel's God himself, in human form, is returning at last to the city and Temple dedicated to his honour, to put to rights at every level, that which has gone wrong.

We who still await the final day of God's judgment, the final, second, coming of Jesus to our world, would do well to ponder this 'coming' to Jerusalem as a sign and foretaste of what God's final judgment will be like.