

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 2 November 2025 - The Fourth Sunday before Advent/All Saints Day

Lectionary Readings (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on)

Isaiah 1.10–18; Psalm 32.1–8; 2 Thessalonians 1; Luke 19.1–10

Homily

Today's homily has been written by the Revd Canon Fiona Brampton, Bishop's Advisor for World Mission and Priest in Charge, North Leightonstone

I wonder if you can remember the first time you heard the story of Zacchaeus. It seems as if I've always known it, along with the chorus 'Zacchaeus was a very little man....' telling the story in an unforgettable way.

Zacchaeus was short – noticeably short. But he was also one of the hated tax collectors. Tax collectors gathered in the taxes for the Roman Government, but they also added in a cut of the money for themselves. So, they were doubly hated – because they were seen as colluding with the Romans, but also because they were making themselves wealthy at the expense of the people.

I like to think that generally, as people, we're kind. We let children and those who are shorter than us go in front. Of course, I've been in places where those in the front row aren't going to give up their place for anything, but that's the exception. Mostly, we're kind – unless we really don't like the person trying to make their way in front of us.

Zacchaeus knew he wanted to see Jesus. We're not given any backstory, so we don't know why it was so important for Zacchaeus to get a ringside view of Jesus, but that's what he wanted. So, he came up with a plan. He climbed into one of the trees lining the road.

All was going well, until Jesus saw him in the tree. And then Jesus did the unexpected. He stopped. We're not told that he addressed the religious people or any of the rest of the waiting crowd. He'd already stopped once to heal a blind man who called out to him. Now he stopped and called Zacchaeus down from the tree. He announced that he must stay at Zacchaeus' house.

You can just imagine the uproar in the crowd. They weren't expecting this. Jesus couldn't be anything special if he didn't recognise how awful Zacchaeus was. This tax collector was the last person who should receive any encouragement.

In the previous chapter in Luke's gospel, Jesus had told the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. The Pharisee reminded God of how wonderful he was, and how faithful. The tax collector simply said, 'God have mercy on me, a sinner.'

Zacchaeus responded to Jesus' request with a complete change of heart.

I know that I've both heard and told this story since I was a young child, but I don't think I'd ever noticed where it took place. It took place in Jericho. Jericho was important as it was the first place that the Hebrew people encountered when they entered the Promised Land. Joshua's spies found shelter with Rahab, who was seen as a prostitute. She welcomed God's people into her house. Jericho was probably the first walled city, walled for defensive purposes, but, according to the book of Joshua, those walls were as nothing in the face of God's plans 'and the walls came a-tumbling down' (as you might also have sung many times).

I recently asked a congregation why they thought Zacchaeus had a change of heart, and offered to pay back fourfold to those he had cheated, and to give his possessions to the poor. People immediately said that Jesus had pointed out where he was going wrong. That would be an obvious answer. However, we have no story of Jesus doing this. He simply says that he is coming to make his dwelling, even for a short time, with Zacchaeus. Jesus responded to Zacchaeus with love.

In the face of welcome and acceptance, the walls of Zacchaeus' heart fell down as dramatically as the walls of the city all those centuries before. Rahab's name crops up in the genealogy of Jesus as given in Matthew 1. Rahab welcomed the spies into her home and life; her descendent, Jesus, found a welcome in the home of this despised rich man in Jericho. It's one of those wonderful 'God moments' (I can't call them co-incidences) that makes me want to laugh out loud as I discover them.

Let's just sit with the story of Zacchaeus once more. It's worth picturing the scene in your head – the bustle and noise of the people, as Jesus and his friends go by. Perhaps lots of people are calling out to try to catch his attention. I wonder where you are in the crowd. I wonder which of the characters in the scene you most associate with. I wonder why you associate with them.

On this All Saints Sunday, we remember all those who encountered love in the face of the living Jesus and whose walls 'came tumbling down' – to live changed lives fearlessly in Christ's redeeming love. Some of them are well known, and their stories are told annually. Others might be known only to us – the people who inspired our faith. Maybe amongst them are the people who showed us how overwhelming Christ's love for us is that we responded by our own 'God, have mercy on me a sinner' and responded by a whole hearted giving of ourselves. So today, we give thanks for all those people, known throughout the Christian world and known only to God himself.

But we can't leave the story there. We are Christ's hands and feet and eyes and voice in the world today. We have to move from being in the crowd to being the presence of Jesus. We need to look – not for the one doing everything our way, but the one who desperately needs to know Jesus, who needs Jesus to 'dwell with them' and to change their life to one of hope and freedom. People won't always be happy with us if we're with the sinner, the outcast, the forgotten – but God's love will make walls and barriers fall down. And we need to take that same hope into those parts of our world, our communities, our churches – to live in the hope that love breaks every barrier down. Let the love of Christ fill and change us that we might transform the world around us.

Suggested intercessions

Jesus said, 'I must stay at your house today.'

Thank you, Jesus, that you chose to dwell with us. We pray for your Church on earth.

We give thanks for Bishop Dagmar and her leadership. We pray for those charged with choosing a new Bishop of Ely

We pray for our own church and those who help us to show the love of Christ in our community. Help us not to judge or to condemn, but to look at people with the same accepting love with which you gaze on us.

Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer

'And all who saw it began to grumble'

We pray for a world that seeks to divide, to decide who is acceptable and who is not.

We pray for those around the world who lead people into dangerous divisions.

We pray for those who live at the mercy of other people's favour, or desire for popularity; for all those who are affected by war.

We pray that all those whose voices influence others may be guided by love.

Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer

Jesus said, 'The Son of Man came to seek out and save the lost.'

We pray for those who need to know that Christ chooses to dwell with them today.

We pray for those who feel rejected and unloved; for those who are lonely;

We pray for those who are unwell. We pray for those who need to know Jesus' hands holding them as they make their final journey

Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer

'Today, salvation has come to this house'

We give thanks for all those whose encounter with the living Christ has brought light and love to their lives. We give thanks for those who have inspired us.

We give thanks that they are now with the saints in heaven joining their voices with ours as we pray

Merciful Father,
**accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen**

Suggested hymns/songs

Amazing Grace

And can it be

I the Lord of sea and sky
Let all the world, in every corner sing
Let us build a house (Marty Haugen)
Lord, we come to ask for healing (Jean Holloway)
Father of heaven, whose love profound
Love divine, all loves excelling
The love of God comes close (John Bell and Graham Maule)
Will you come and follow me

Activities to accompany the service

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
- <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
- [reflectionary.org](https://www.reflectionary.org/) – lectionary-based resources
- [engageworship](https://www.engageworship.org/) – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>
(weekly@lectionary resource)