

October 31, 2010

LUKE 19: 1-10, The Saving of Zacchaeus

### **Love Leads Us Home!**

The other day I went out to work in my yard. The ground was nice and soft from the rain, easy to dig. The weeds were easy to pull.

And so I was digging and pulling. I enjoy getting my hands dirty and planting plants.

My house has been here a long time and it's had many different residents, so it's often interesting what I find when I dig. There is some kind of big concrete something in the backyard that goes down at least a foot and is about 3 and a half feet in diameter.

There doesn't seem to be anything I can do about that except cover it back up and work around it.

That is the one big thing that I've found, but in some ways all the little things I have found are more interesting to me.

Things like----

Part of a GI Joe doll.

A broken spray nozzle, the kind that you attach to the hose when you want to water.

Several stepping stones were buried. Pieces of concrete and metal that may have been from a clothes line support.

Broken glass is always dangerous to find. You have to wonder why someone would bury that!

The most recent find was a plain glass marble. I didn't throw that away. I saved it.

Hard-working people have lived in that house, people who used clotheslines instead of dryers. People who took care of the yard and children who played there.

People who broke things and people who lost things.

And now I am finding those broken and lost things as I live there.

I am sure that I will lose things as well, and someone else will find them years from now. And they will wonder about me, what I was like, what kinds of things I did, and why would I bury whatever it will be that they dig up?

And so this week I have been thinking and wondering about lost things.

And of course, that led me to think about God and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jesus talked a lot about lost things. He told stories about lost coins, lost sheep, sons who were lost.

He cleansed ten lepers and healed many other people, spoke to beggars, had dinner with sinners, and spoke to Samaritans.

He welcomed little children to come and talk to him when adults did not want them to bother him.

People of all sorts came to him, the young, the sinner, the poor, the least of these, the last who would be made first, and the lost, who would be found and saved.

Even the rich came to him, because there was something more they needed over and above riches. In the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke, just before our passage this morning, a rich ruler came to him to ask what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus has just said that only those who are like little children will enter the kingdom of God, and so this rich man asks him what he needs to do to get there.

Jesus is not very encouraging. He doesn't make it easy. He tells him to keep the 10 commandments and the man tells him that he has. There are only two more things that he needs to do, according to Jesus---sell all he has and give the money to the poor, and then come follow him.

The rich young ruler is also lost. He came to Jesus wanting to be found, but he wasn't willing to give anything up in order to be found, so he went away again, still lost. He buried himself back down in the hole he had dug for himself, lost under his attachment to his wealth.

Jesus reacts, not in judgment but in understanding---"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it is for someone who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God."

Not because God doesn't like rich people! Not because God requires more from rich people!

Jesus is just stating the fact that when something else is more important to us than our relationship with God, we are lost!

The rich young ruler's wealth was more important to him than following Jesus! He was unwilling to do what it took to change that, so he went away sad.

So it's no great contradiction when Jesus finds Zacchaeus in a tree and tells him that he is coming over to his house for dinner.

No great contradiction that Jesus saves Zacchaeus, who is not only rich but who got his wealth by cheating the people on their taxes.

No great contradiction that Jesus becomes a friend of a little short guy who is so desperate to see him that he leaves his dignified, powerful reputation behind and climbs up in a sycamore tree in order to see this rabbi he has heard so much about.

Zachaeus wanted so badly to have a relationship with Jesus, even if it was only just a passing glimpse, that he was willing to jeopardize the power that he had over the people--- power that depended on him maintaining some sort of distance from the people, that was based to a certain degree on fear and intimidation.

Climbing that tree was laughable, not intimidating, not something that would cause people to be more afraid of him.

Zacchaeus had stopped thinking about himself, his wealth, his power, and started thinking about Jesus, about being helped and healed.

He might have been trying to stop being lost and wanted to be found. Even if that was not a conscious thought, it's obvious that he wanted SOMETHING from Jesus, wanted it badly enough to run (something adult men never did in that culture), run ahead of the crowd and climb up in a tree so he could see Jesus.

We can find ourselves lost and desperate, too. Sometimes we don't even know what we're looking for, and that's because we are the ones who are lost.

We don't need to be looking. We need to be found.

Sometimes your life can get off-track and you're not quite sure how it happened. You end up in a dead-end job that just feels like you're wasting your life, not doing anything important, not feeling like you're getting anything out of it. You need a change and you don't know how to make that change happen.

You're lost. You need to be found.

Or maybe you feel overworked and anxious. Maybe you are overwhelmed with schoolwork or taking care of your baby or your parents. Maybe it seems like you are trapped and there is no way out of your situation.

You're lost. You need to be found.

Maybe everyday life has become a struggle. Your health isn't good or your marriage is in trouble or your kids are having problems. Or any one or two or three or more problems are hitting you all at once. You don't know what to do about any of it.

It seems like there's no end to the struggle. You don't know what to do to make things better. Things are out of your control.

You're lost. You need to be found.

Any time you feel alone or your life's out of control or no one understands or that things are impossible and there is no answer--- any time your problems seem bigger than God----

You're lost. You need to be found.

Zacchaeus was shunned by his own community. A tax collector who was Jewish was rejected by his own people. They were afraid of him, hated him, tried to keep him from seeing Jesus.

He probably didn't have a lot of friends. The friends he had were also unscrupulous, cheating, greedy people working for the occupying, oppressing Romans.

Maybe he was tired of it all but he didn't see any way out. The Romans wouldn't be too happy if he quit his job. And the people he had cheated all those years probably wouldn't become his friends all the sudden.

He was starved for relationship. He was starved for love. And so he ran to see Jesus, who seemed to be the answer for so many people.

And Jesus was the answer for him, too.

Seeing Zacchaeus up in the tree, Jesus knows what he needs. He needs relationship. He needs love. He is lost and he needs to be found.

Jesus invites himself to Zacchaeus' house, invites himself into a relationship with him, invites him to his own house.

Jesus, in love, leads Zacchaeus home. Home to his own house, which will now be a home filled with love.

Love leads Zacchaeus home to the place where he can make the choice to stop cheating, to stop being greedy, to stop being dishonest.

Home to the place where he can turn his life around based on the strength of the love that Jesus has offered him. Home where Jesus is just the first of many new friends who will come to visit.

Home where he's no longer lost in greed and dishonesty. He is found by love and his life is changed for ever. Not because he has to change in order to be loved! He changes BECAUSE he is loved!

When we are lost and need to be found, all we need to do is to look for Jesus. Maybe that means climbing up in a tree to see over the crowd that makes life so hard. Climbing up in the tree to get a clearer view of what's important---of WHO is important!

If you are feeling lost, like something's missing in your life, like something needs to change and you don't know how to make that happen, step apart from life as you know it. Do something different and try to see Jesus!

Jesus is waiting for you to do that. When we admit that we need Jesus enough to run after him, to take a chance, to do something different even if it might mean that people laugh at you,

Then Jesus will see you and invite you to come back to your own house, the place where you belong. He will lead you home in love, calling to you gently and yet there is no way to say no to him.

Jesus is just waiting for us to recognize that we are lost. As soon as we know that, we will be found.

Because Jesus is always there, waiting for us to see him looking at us and ready to lead us home in love.

We are lost, and we need to be found.

That little glass marble that I found in the dirt of my yard----while it was buried and lost, it could not be what a marble is supposed to be. A marble is for playing with, and when it was covered with dirt, no one played with it. Its purpose was left unfulfilled.

When we are buried by the circumstances of our life, when we are in the darkness of our struggles and our suffering, we can not fulfill our purpose, either.

Our purpose is to have a relationship with the living God.

Suddenly, Jesus comes along and digs us up, or calls us down out of a tree. We don't belong buried in the dirt or up in a tree, so when Christ saves us, we are free to go back where we belong, free to do what we are created to do, free to be who we are called to be---beloved children of God, living in love and shining, like that glass marble, in the light of God's grace.

Amen.