

Stewardship – Finance.

Luke 19:1-10 (The story of Zacchaeus)

Acts 2:42-47

Today I am sharing the third of my Stewardship talks. April the 15th was on Worship, April 29th on Service and today is giving; finances.

Just as worship and service are a response to our experience of Jesus Christ, so finance is the same.

When it comes to Sunday School favourite stories – I think the story of Zacchaeus must be up there alongside the Good Samaritan, the Lost Sheep and the Wise and Foolish builders.

The three I just mentioned are parables, so one can legitimately play around with the stories because they are parable stories. Zacchaeus though is a genuine account of an event that took place in Jericho, so we need to make sure we don't exaggerate or mislead when thinking about the events.

What we know as generally true about that time and place in history; is that Tax Collectors were not well liked. They were frequently used as an illustration of a sinner. They were most likely local people working on behalf of the local government AND the Romans and it was accepted practice that it was an opportunity to make money for themselves, that most took advantage of.

Thus we can assume that a tax collector was estranged from the local community, (hated even) their friends were friends of business and convenience (maybe not genuine) so it might be fair to say they would be lonely people. I'm speculating.

What though do you think was going on in Zacchaeus life?
How was he feeling?
What was motivating him?

If we look at what happened later, is it fair to assume that his wealth had become a burden to him? Maybe keeping his position, status and wealth was leaving him feeling hollow and desperate? Your opinion is as valid as anyone else who reads Luke chapter 19.

I have the impression of a man in whom the pressure was rising, like a bubble, internal pressure that led him to do something ridiculous and strange.

There is one thing we know to be true, he is described as a short man. We know as well that if people don't like someone, they will express their feelings by barbed comments and unkind words about height, weight, being ginger, a squint, hair, lack of hair, hair in the wrong place...whatever might be thought a weak spot to cause hurt. You know this to be true.

The very very last thing a short person will do, if at all conscious of their reputation is draw attention to themselves by doing something as mental as climbing a tree.

Zacchaeus was obviously desperate and longed to see Jesus. What happens next is lovely.

*⁵ When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.'*⁶ *So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.*

Of course that caused gossip of a different kind, not about Zacchaeus height but his status as recognisable sinner Why would this Rabbi go to his house?

I would love to know what happened inside Zacchaeus house. I would love to know what Jesus said, what Jesus did, what went on because what happened next was outstanding.

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Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, *'Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.'*

In response Jesus makes clear what his intention had been all along

'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.'

However we might describe or speculate on Zacchaeus situation, Jesus describes it as lost.

Lost to his community
Lost to his faith and to God
Lost perhaps to himself?

Through Jesus, Zacchaeus is restored.

I suspect the issues in Zacchaeus life were all to do with the accumulation of his wealth and holding on to that wealth. His response to Jesus set him free and in this case in rather spectacular fashion – giving away half and repaying 4* as much to anyone he cheated.

Holding onto wealth can be habit forming.

There was an old man who worked all his life and saved all his money. He was a miser, he lived like a pauper, but he loved his money more than just about anything else in the world.

Just before he died, he said to his wife, "When I die, I want you to take all my money and put it in the coffin with me. I need my

money in the afterlife. Can you promise me that you'll do that?"

His wife was faithful, so she promised him with all her heart that when he died, she would put all his money in the coffin.

When the old man died his wife gave him a proper funeral. He was laid out in a beautiful coffin and his faithful wife was in the front row dressed in black, sitting beside her best friend. When the ceremony ended, just before the undertakers got ready to close the coffin, the wife rose from her seat and said, "Wait just a minute!"

With that, she placed a box inside the coffin.

The friend grabbed the wife by the arm and said, you weren't stupid enough to put all his money in there with him were you?

The wife said to her friend, "Listen, I am a Christian woman and I can never lie. I promised him that I was going to put the money in his casket with him and I did."

The friend was horrified and asked, "You mean to tell me that you put all that money in the coffin with that man?"

The wife replied, "I certainly did...I wrote him a cheque."

Zacchaeus experience of encountering Jesus set him free, and he used his money to demonstrate what that freedom meant. He would have had to work out what to do next...how to give half away and to whom. How to go back through the books and repay those he cheated...he would have to get practical about it.

Our Stewardship campaign invites all church members to reflect on their ability to give to the church and to be practical about it. If you pay tax, gift aid the money...that sort of thing. We ask everyone, as far as possible to use a standing order, it's so

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much more efficient for all concerned. I ask too that you review what you can give and where possible increase...our costs are not going down year on year.

Be practical about it.

But do it in response to Jesus Christ. On behalf of the church. I can re-assure you that we shall be as diligent as we can in our Stewardship of money given. The long term goal I have set it to have a much much larger income, guided by the payment to the Diocese. If we regard this amount as one third, I would love to see the day when we give £83,000 to the Diocese, follow the discipline of keeping our own domestic ministry cost to a similar amount and use the same again for new ministry and mission in our community.

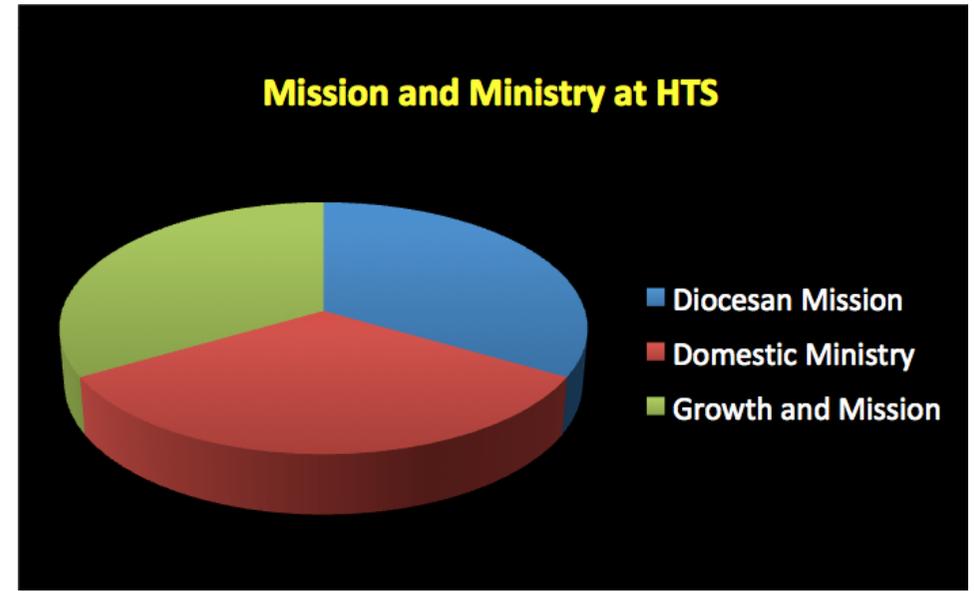
I set this out at the APCM and said that in having a goal such as this we would follow disciplines concerning how we managed finances (the details are in the sermon on the website April 22nd).

In brief the disciplines are what the PCC will follow in handling the money entrusted by you to the church, so that you are confident we are good Stewards. But don't give because I have set a goal. Give in response to Jesus Christ.

We do have a financial need, we are a long way off balancing our budget, and we need every church member to give what they can. I'm not expecting half what you have – if you feel you want to copy Zacchaeus make sure I'm sitting down before telling me.

In his one meeting with Jesus Christ, Zacchaeus life, priorities, values, outlook, behaviours were transformed and turned completely upside down. In responding to Jesus and in being

set free to give – he experienced real joy. May that be your experience too. Let us pray.



Diocesan Mission	= £83,000
Domestic Ministry	= £83,000
Growth and Mission	= £83,000
Target	£249,000
2017 Income	£146,766