

I'm sure you will all have heard the saying, 'There's nothing certain in this life except death and taxes!' Despite the very good reasons why they are collected, I can be pretty confident in saying there are very few people who actually *enjoy* paying taxes. Of course there are others (no names mentioned Jimmy Carr!) who will do everything they can to avoid paying them. People who collect taxes are rarely popular and in Bible times, it was no exception. Back then, tax collectors weren't paid a salary from the Roman equivalent of HMRC; instead they had permission to add an additional, unspecified fee, on top of the taxes they collected and to add that amount to their own pockets in lieu of a salary. This meant that most tax collectors became very rich indeed and were very unpopular - Zacchaeus in our story was no exception.

But one day, Zacchaeus has an encounter that completely changes his life. It's the moment when he was trying to do a bit of "celebrity spotting" by climbing a tree to see Jesus, and instead of signing an autograph, Jesus notices him from the middle of the crowd and decides to come round to his for dinner. And then *something* happens. In the moment that Zacchaeus meets Jesus, he is confronted by the reality of who he is and who he has become and he is completely changed. It's a bit like the moment when Ebenezer Scrooge meets the 3 ghosts at Christmas and does a complete 180 in his character. Ebenezer, like Zacchaeus, is given a chance to start fresh.

I wonder if you've ever experienced a moment when you know that everything has changed and nothing will ever be the same again? Sometimes those moments are of course good, other times they are difficult, but they are usually moments that we remember forever. So I wonder if there is anything in your life that you actually want to change? Or believe needs to change? Maybe, like Zacchaeus, you need to experience a moment of meeting God face-to-face (so to speak!) and having the strength to become a different person. If that applies to you, then I hope you will be able to hand over whatever the issue or situation may be and ask for God's help in becoming a changed person. There are always second chances if only we have the courage to seek them out!



Prayer:

Gracious God, we thank you that you always notice us even if we're hiding at the back of a crowd or think we're going to be difficult to spot. Thank you that if we're looking for you, you will always find us. Please help us, just like Zacchaeus did, to figure out if there is anything in us that needs to change, and then give us the strength to offer it to you and ask for your help. Thank you that you always love us, no matter what. Amen.



Gospel Reading: Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

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

All the people saw this and began to mutter, 'He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.'

But 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.'

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