

Seek and Seek

November 3, 2019

Luke 19:1-10

When I was a child, I loved playing games, especially “Hide and Seek.” When I was small, I was able to fit into very small spaces, like under the sink or under a bed. I loved hiding under beds, because I was very good at surrounding myself with boxes that were under there already so that if someone looked under there, they wouldn’t see me, but I could still see them. As I got bigger though, I no longer fit under the sink or under beds. I had to settle for crouching down in bath tubs or in closets. However, I was also very competitive, meaning that, for a time, I would try to move around while the seeker was seeking, making it all the harder to find me. Some might call it cheating. I called it “adding a twist to the game to spice it up.” Once my nieces and nephews started coming into the picture though, I stopped “spicing up the game.”

In reading this week’s passage though, I had a bit of a thought for a new twist: two people seeking each other. You drop them at separate entrances to a shopping center during peak business hours, and they have to find each other. I admit, this might be one of my corniest ideas for a twist in a game, but it’s not an unheard of concept. If a person gets separated from their spouse, child, grandchild, whoever in a shopping center, a mall, wherever, you now have two people trying to find each other. Plus, this idea of two people seeking each other is something we see in today’s reading.

The first seeker is Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus is the chief tax collector in Jericho, meaning he is not exactly the most well-liked person in town. People despised him, because tax collectors were known to cheat people out of their money by charging more than they actually owed, keeping all the excess. A tax collector was a person with the stigma of being greedy. Zacchaeus, though, was the *chief* tax collector, meaning he was the top of the food chain when it came to this particular group. This is ironic because, what he didn’t lack in wealth, he lacked in height. Using the politically correct phrase, Zacchaeus was “altitudinally challenged.” This made him even less liked among people because a person who was small in stature was also viewed as being small in character, courage, and spirit. In short then (pun not intended), Zacchaeus was loved as much as the leprous Samaritan from a few weeks ago, which doesn’t say much.

However, even amidst having fabulous wealth as the chief tax collector, Zacchaeus was still seeking something: salvation. He heard that Jesus was coming to town, and because he recognized that he would not be able to see Jesus if he stood on the ground with everyone else, he climbed a tree to get a better view. In no way is this him indicating he is above/is better than everyone else, because we have no indication that he believes that at all. He is simply trying to get a better view; nothing more. Now, the Bible says Zacchaeus wanted to “see” Jesus, but this word is actually better translated as “searching for” or “seeking.” So, Zacchaeus is “seeking” Jesus, who is the embodiment of salvation.

Jesus, on the other hand, is the other seeker. The last line of the passage, Jesus says, “For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.” We see similar messages to this in many of Jesus’ parables, “The Parable of the Lost Sheep,” “The Parable of the Lost Coin,” and “The

Parable of the Prodigal Son” being a few of them. In all of these parables, there is a seeking of that which is lost and a celebration when that lost item/person is found. The same is true here: Jesus came not for the righteous, but the sinners. Jesus came to save not those who are already saved (that wouldn’t make sense) but those in need of saving. Well, Zacchaeus is potentially a greedy person who may be guilty of swindling people out of money. If nothing else, he is lost in societies rejection of him because of his being a short person and the chief tax collector, meaning he was in need of being found. So, he fits the bill for the type of person Jesus is seeking after.

Well, Jesus sees Zacchaeus up in the tree and calls to him, telling him that he will be staying at Zacchaeus’s house and to go prepare it for his arrival. Now, notice the direction of the actions. Jesus sees Zacchaeus, not vice versa. Jesus speaks to Zacchaeus, not the other way around. Zacchaeus has made no invitation to Jesus to come over, to speak with him, or even called out to Jesus to get his attention; Jesus has seen him himself, initiated the interaction, and invited himself over Zacchaeus’s house. Then, he enters into Zacchaeus’s home, again, not by Zacchaeus’s invitation, which would indicate this being part of God’s plan. When he does, Zacchaeus offers to give half of his possessions to the poor and to pay back four times anything he has swindled from anyone as a tax collector. In reply, Jesus says, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham.” What this means is that God, working through Jesus, has entered into this household and blessed it because, just as we might be seeking God, God is seeking after us as well, meeting us then in the middle.

Relating it back to us, we are all seeking God. Something happens in our lives (a “Jacob” event, like we spoke about a couple weeks ago) and we seek God out so that we can get answers to our questions (“Why did this happen?” “How does this fit into the divine plan of a God of Love?” “How do I move forward?”). We commit a sin, and we seek God out that we might be forgiven and shown the right path to take in the future or given the strength to not be tempted again. We come to church on any given Sunday to seek this forgiveness and these answers. However, the opposite of this is true as well. Something happens in our lives, and God works through others to reassure us that everything will be alright, that to this there is a reason, that God is there as well. We commit a sin, and God seeks us out in our thoughts and our hearts, seeking to see that we do regret it and that we desire forgiveness. God saw that we were lost and sent Jesus to find us, to gather us up as a shepherd gathers their flock, that we might come home and be one group again. Our God is not a stagnant God. God doesn’t just sit around, waiting for us. God actively seeks us, just as we actively seek him. My idea of a twist on “Hide and Seek” doesn’t sound so corny anymore, does it? In all seriousness, though, we all feel lost at times, seeking God for guidance. Some of you may be seeking answers, forgiveness, God in general right now. Rest assured in these two things: you are doing the right thing in seeking God, and God is out there looking for you, too.