



Peace Sunday  
November 4, 2007

*All who believed were together and had all things in common. They would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.*

—Acts 2: 44-45

## Introduction

We have not let Zacchaeus grow up. For many of us he is still the “wee little man” we sang about in children’s Sunday school that climbed up in a tree in order to see Jesus. Also, we have stereotyped Zacchaeus as a greedy little man who gets saved by Jesus and changes his wicked ways. Zacchaeus, a marginalized tax collector, confessed to Jesus several radical economic practices. He went far beyond simply sharing his goods with the poor. The story of Zacchaeus provides us with a biblical text with which to reflect in study and worship on radical economic practices and the place of the marginalized in pew, public, and politics.

## Biblical Reflections

The story of Zacchaeus is found only in Luke’s gospel (19:1-10). It comes at the end of Luke’s travel narrative. The story also fits in within Luke’s emphasis upon Jesus’s welcome of the sinner, outcast, poor and marginalized. Zacchaeus serves as a contrast character to the rich ruler (Luke 18:18-28).

Zacchaeus was a chief toll collector. As a tax collector he would have been among society’s despised and marginalized persons. The Pharisees stereotypically referred to Zacchaeus as a “sinner.” Jesus transgressed the social borders of his day by associating with “tax collectors and sinners.”

As a chief tax collector Zacchaeus would have had to make a bid to the Roman administration to collect local taxes through tax collectors he would employ to earn a profit. The toll system was easily abused through cheating and extortion and made some rich. But even though Zacchaeus was wealthy it appears that he was just in his economic practices.

There are problems with interpreting Zacchaeus as a “greedy little man” who repents of his unjust practices in the presence of Jesus. The problem comes with the interpretation of a Greek verb tense of two words in the text. The words are often translated in a future tense as “I will give” and “I will pay back.” This traditional translation makes Zacchaeus into a sinner who repents of his unjust economic practices in the presence of Jesus.

Though those translations are possible, the present tense of both words would appear to indicate a present ongoing action “I am giving” and “I am paying back.” Another possible interpretation is that Zacchaeus was being unjustly labeled a sinner. Remember, Zacchaeus’s name means “just, pure, innocent.” Zacchaeus was a righteous man. He had been practicing a radical form of economic redistribution. He gave half of his possessions away to the poor and paid back at 400 percent those he may have inadvertently defrauded! Whether or not Zacchaeus did this before or after he met Jesus, he went far beyond just economics to embrace a radical economics in redistributing his wealth.

Jesus announced “salvation” and “sonship” to the “house” of Zacchaeus. Jesus wanted to make it clear to the Pharisees and those gathered that Zacchaeus was a welcomed child of Abraham and had as much claim to the salvation of God’s people as anyone else, even though he was a tax collector.

This story from Luke’s gospel has profound implications for how we stereotype and label marginalized persons in our own society. Luke’s narrative also encourages us to practice, as wealthy North Americans, at least a just if not a radical economics. There are lessons here that can be drawn out in the liturgy performed, the sermons preached, and the public actions practiced in church and society.

## Sermon Seeds

The story of Zacchaeus can be connected to contemporary social issues from a number of different sermonic angles:

1. **Affirming the Marginalized**—Zacchaeus was among the socially marginalized group of tax collectors. In the sermon, the preacher can explore Jesus’s welcoming of the poor, stranger and marginalized. Other New Testament texts can stand alongside this one from Luke to reveal the inclusive vision of God’s reign. Who are the marginalized persons/groups in your community, church, and our society? Are some of them those Christians who practice forms of radical discipleship? How can the church affirm and welcome any who are excluded or marginalized?
2. **Radical Economic Practices**—Zacchaeus went beyond just economics in practicing a radical form of wealth redistribution. Just and radical economic practices move the church beyond simple charity. Explore and compare biblical texts that point to a more just economics (e.g., Jubilee—Leviticus 25) to those that embody a more radical form of sharing (e.g., communal living of the early church—Acts 2). Are both just and radical economic practices legitimate forms of embodying a contemporary Christian social ethic?
3. **Salvation and Wealth Redistribution**—Jesus announced salvation to the house of Zacchaeus, who expressed his faith in economic sharing with the poor. The preacher can delve

into the relationship between salvation and social justice. How does new life in Christ connect with wholeness and healing within social, economic, and political life? How does salvation come to a “house,” a group, a collective?

## Action Ideas

The action ideas listed here are more conservative than radical, given the nature of most Christian congregations and their economic practices.

1. Start a small group or get individual congregational members involved in organizations working to educate and advocate for the alleviation of poverty: 1) Mennonite Central Committee, Washington Office, Global Economic Justice: [mcc.org/us/washington/issues/econjustice/index.html](http://mcc.org/us/washington/issues/econjustice/index.html); 2) Jubilee USA Network: [www.jubileeusa.org/](http://www.jubileeusa.org/); 3) One Campaign: <http://one.org/>; 4) Sabbath Economics Collaborative: [www.sabbatheconomics.org](http://www.sabbatheconomics.org).
2. Create a congregational sharing possessions program. First, create some ground rules for borrowing and sharing possessions with others. Then have people sign up who are willing to share their goods such as cars, bicycles, lawnmowers, cameras, etc., with others in the congregation.
3. Locate a nearby Bruderhof or an intentional Christian community that practices more radical forms of economic sharing, redistribution, and simple lifestyles that might be open to a visit by a church group or a few individuals for an interview. Discuss with these communities how their faith shapes their lifestyle practices. If it is an interview, share what you heard in a Sunday school class or small group discussion.

## Children’s Ideas

1. Cut out a tree from cardboard and paint it. Construct simple costumes for children to play parts in the Zacchaeus story (e.g., hats, beards, robes). Have a small dinner table set up. Assign parts for Zacchaeus, Jesus, the Pharisees, and the crowd. Read aloud the story and have the children move to various places in the story.
2. Read the story of St. Francis, who was a peacemaker who practiced radical economics. Use Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.’s *Saint Francis of Assisi: A Life of Joy* (Hyperion, 2005) or Tomie dePaolo’s *St. Francis: The Poor Man of Assisi* (Holiday House, 1990). Emphasize how St. Francis gave up warmaking and gave his possessions to the poor. Recite line for line the prayer of St. Francis in Hymnal: A Worship Book, No. 733.
3. Choose a Mennonite Central Committee project that assists those in poverty (e.g., well digging project). Announce the collection 2–3 weeks ahead of time. Have adults, youth, and children bring their change to share. Collect the change over a 3–4 week period concluding on Peace Sunday. Provide cups for the children to collect money from the congregation.

## Bibliography

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Peace Sunday material was written by Leo Hartshorn, Minister of Peace and Justice, Mennonite Mission Network and designed by Cynthia Friesen Coyle, Peace and Justice Support Network volunteer. For peace and justice resources and to join the network go to: [www.mennoniteusa.org/peace](http://www.mennoniteusa.org/peace). For more information about PJSN or to offer your responses to the Peace Sunday material contact: Leo Hartshorn, Mennonite Mission Network, 202 South Ann Street, Lancaster, PA, 17602, 717-399-8353, [LeoH@MennoniteMission.net](mailto:LeoH@MennoniteMission.net). Your financial gifts are crucial for continuing to strengthen the vision of peace and justice in Mennonite Church USA. Thanks for your support.



## Worship Service

### Gathering Songs

*Come and See*  
*Confitemini Domino*

Hymnal: A Worship Book, No. 20  
Sing the Journey, No. 59

### Call to Worship (from Psalm 32)

Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven.

***Happy are those to whom God imputes no iniquity.***

Let all who are faithful offer to you, O God.

***You are a bidding place for us.***

You preserve us from trouble.

***You surround us with glad cries of deliverance.***

### Hymns of Praise

*Cantemos al Señor*  
*Over my head*

Hymnal: A Worship Book, No. 55  
Sing the Journey, No. 18

## Call to Confession (from Isaiah 1:10-15)

Hear the word of the Lord,  
What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?  
When you come before me,  
who asked this from your hand?  
Trample my courts no more;  
bringing offerings is futile.  
When you stretch out your hands,  
I will hide my eyes from you;  
even though you make many prayers,  
I will not listen.

## Prayer of Confession (from Isaiah 1:16-17)

*We will:*  
**Wash ourselves, make ourselves clean,  
remove the evil of our doings  
from before your eyes;  
cease to do evil,  
learn to do good;  
seek justice,  
rescue the oppressed,  
defend the orphan,  
plead for the widow.**

## Silent Confession

## Words of Assurance (from Isaiah 1:18)

Come now, let us argue it out,  
says the Lord;  
though your sins be like scarlet,  
they shall be like snow;  
though they are red like crimson,  
they shall be like wool.  
If you are willing and obedient,  
you shall eat the good of the land.

## Theme Hymns

*What does the Lord require  
Let justice flow like streams*

Hymnal: A Worship Book, 409  
Sing the Journey, No. 65

## Children's Time (See Children's Ideas)

## The Word Proclaimed (See Sermon Ideas)

## Offering Prayer (unison)

*Gracious God, we may not have given half of our possessions to the poor; but we will seek to share our goods to bring hope to the poor, oppressed, and marginalized. We may not have paid back four fold what we have defrauded from you, but we will give our gifts to support your church and its ministries. Open our hearts and hands to give more freely and joyfully. Bring salvation to this house, we pray. Amen.*

## Offering Hymns

*I bind my heart this tide  
Cuandro el pobre*

Hymnal: A Worship Book, No. 411  
Sing the Journey, No. 69

## Benediction Hymns

*Move in our midst  
How can we be silent*

Hymnal: A Worship Book, No. 418  
Sing the Journey, No. 61

## Benediction (from Luke 19:9-10)

Today salvation has come to this house  
**We too are children of God  
For Christ came to seek and save the lost.**

