



Reading: Luke 19:1-10

Popularity.

Nobody likes to be unpopular do they? Yet there are some people that we always associate with being popular don't we?

UNPOPULAR

UNPOPULAR – THATCHER

UNPOPULAR – BIN LADEN

UNPOPULAR – NORWICH FANS

UNPOPULAR – TRAFFIC WARDEN

UNPOPULAR – HECTOR THE TAX INSPECTOR

NOT AS NICE The guy in our story, Zachaeus wasn't quite as nice as Hector who in the end has to be a civil servant, who has got to work according to the law and is supposed to treat customers according to the various codes of conduct that civil servants are under.. Zachaeus was a tax collector and possibly the head of a group of tax collectors. To finance the Roman Empire taxes were levied on all those under their control. Zachaeus was a Jew who chose to work for Rome. His position allowed him to corrupt the system for his own ends and line his own pocket. Zachaeus was seen as a traitor to Israel.

The Jewish leaders were particularly critical of those who followed this profession and they openly criticised Jesus for having anything to do with them.

ZACH was a rich fat cat, greedy, unprincipled, unjust, uncaring and all the rest. He enjoyed influence, status and great wealth but there was something missing in his life. In terms of the world he was doing OK but why take an interest in Jesus?

What do you give the person who has everything? Give them something to eat or drink!! Actually people who have everything life can give them often yearn after something bigger, greater that life can't give them. Like what happens after death? It's the only thing that would make me think that would get Zachaeus out on the street and up a tree to see a guy like Jesus who everyone said did have all the answers to life, the universe and everything.

Because whatever he was by then, he's still been a good Jewish lad, brought up in the Jewish faith, knew right from wrong and knew he was a crook. Yet he was a Jew and at the same time he was extorting money from people which he knew was wrong. Deep down there was something that said that he needed to be right with God.

Why Back to Church Sunday? Well it's not something that we have started to guild-ride people to come to our church or anyone else's. It's here to remind each one of us of two things.

First of all of the welcome that God gives to anyone who has moved away from Him but who really wants to come back.

Secondly, it's here to remind us how life-changing the Christian faith is; something we may have forgotten about.

So, let's have a look at what God thought about Zachaeus. Let's see the welcome he got.

SYCAMORE TREE Zachaeus was vertically challenged. It was probably just as well. When you're that unpopular, being short helps you blend better. You can't be seen, but you can't see anything either.

Jesus' reputation as a friend to all had reached Zacchaeus and on hearing that Jesus was in the neighbourhood he wanted to see and hear him. So he climbs a tree so he'll get a good view and hope not to be noticed too much hidden amongst the leaves. After all, he was feared and despised

by ordinary people. It wasn't a good place to be if someone spotted him.

BUT JESUS came to him – He stopped under the tree “Hello Zachaeus”. You could imagine the hundreds of pairs of eyes looking at him! How embarrassing for this man to be caught up a tree. But God wanted him just where he was – not to berate him, make him feel guilty, condemn him or shame him – but to welcome Himself into Zachaeus's home and life! “Zachaeus – get down from that tree – I've just invited myself around your place!” Out of all the great and good in Jericho Jesus desired most to spend time in the house of the man who had turned his back on his people and his God!

Maybe you've responded to an invitation to be here this morning. We haven't done it to make you feel guilty that maybe you haven't been to church for a while.

Or to make you feel bad.

But to say that we have a wonderful God whose desire is to “stay at your place”. He's welcoming Himself in to your life in a fresh way this morning. You've come as you are and Jesus accepts you as you this morning because He loves you.

JESUS MADE A DIFFERENCE So Jesus goes to Zach's house and whatever was said changed the man's life. He changed from the nasty and unjust man, to one who was prepared to put right what was wrong and honour God in his life. How could that have happened so quickly – it was a God thing!

WHAT ABOUT ME?

There's another reason we've invited you here this morning and that's not just to remind you how much God loves you and welcomes you, but that He wants to be dynamic in your life. By this one encounter with Jesus, this man's life was totally changed because that's what Jesus does to people.

Do you need change in your life?

How does your life need to change?

How is Jesus shaking your branch this morning? Perhaps you've had some experience of church in the past but never came into a living relationship with Jesus. He's inviting Himself into your life. He loves you. He died for your sin so that you may find forgiveness and an eternal relationship with God. He asks you to open your life to Him this morning, find forgiveness and let Him change you.

Perhaps you'd forgotten just how amazing Jesus is and you know God is calling you. Respond to that call, because He is the one who readily forgives and readily welcomes back those who have moved away for whatever reason, whether it was life, other people, being angry with God for something that happened.

Maybe you've been to church before but were put off. You like God but people at church?? God desires that if we are believers that we should grow with His people. That's what church is for. I know many people who have been put off Jesus because of how they have been treated by Christians. But it's easy to generalise. God has a niche where each of us can grow and be blessed by Him – are we prepared to listen to Him and find the church fellowship He is calling us too.

Most of all we have a Saviour who is calling us this morning – come as you are I want to spend time in your house today!

Prayer