

CS-Pentecost 22 --- October 30, 2016 ---- Luke 19:1-10 --- Who You Voting For? By The Rev. John K. Morrell, Priest and Rector St. Mark's Halifax

(Sources used – Esermons.com, Richard Fairchild www. Rockies.net)

Elections were used as early in history as ancient Greece and ancient Rome, and throughout the Medieval period to select rulers such as the Holy Roman Emperor and the Pope. In the earliest period of Islamic history in the 7th C. elections took place to replace Muhammad after his death. The modern "election", which consists of public elections of government officials, didn't emerge until the beginning of the 17th century when the idea of representative government took hold in North America and Europe.

We Nova Scotians, especially those living in the North End, have had three elections within the past 13 months – a Federal election for our MP in October, 2015; A bi-election in August for our Halifax-Needham MLA, and the municipal and school elections in August. What is notable of this political process is that so many voters stay home and do not exercise their political rights.

Unfortunately, the American Presidential election process, which has dominated the airways for over two years before the actual vote takes place in ten days from now, have surpassed all previous campaigns with accusations, innuendo, false statements, bullying, sex exploitation, misuse of emails and internet servers – the list goes on as the world awaits what the final decision will be on November 8th.

This is a background to our gospel reading today. It is about being confronted by Jesus and having to make a decision – to accept who he is and what he is capable of doing, or staying in our current life no matter how miserable and demeaning it may be. There comes a time when we all have to decide - who we're going to be and what we're going to do! That was true for true for Zacchaeus in our text for today. He had a crucial decision to make -and it would change his life forever.

We have two major characters in our story today – Jesus Christ and Zacchaeus the tax collector.

First, some background on Jesus. We are up to the 19th chapter of Luke's gospel which we have been reading most Sundays during this Year C of the Ecumenical Lectionary. On November 27th, the first Sunday of Advent, we will focus on the Gospel of Matthew during Year A of the Ecumenical Lectionary.

If we were to look at Luke's chronology of Jesus life, ministry, and miracles – people in the Galilee and Judea might have heard about some of the following:

- ❖ HEALINGS - of people with unclean spirits, lepers, a man with withered hands, a centurion's servant, a crippled woman, a paralytic or a blind beggar
- ❖ RAISING FROM THE DEAD - a widow's son and Jarius' daughter
- ❖ FEEDING over 5000 people

Then we have Zacchaeus. As a tax collector he had taken advantage of many people. Lied to them. Swindled them. Skimmed off the top of his collections. And beyond all this, he had ignored the poor.

Now it's Tuesday morning for old Zacchaeus and he has to walk in the election booth and pull the lever. Is he going to stand for the state or for a life of faith? His choices are to vote for himself and continue with Rome OR make a change for Christ. Come Election Day, the day Zacchaeus was called down out of that tree, he had to make a choice. Let's put it in election language: He has to cast his vote. Who will he vote for?

FIRST - he could vote for the Tax Collectors. He could decide to continue his life as it always had been. This way he would retain his wealth, but what would it cost him in the end? Let's take a look at some background to answer this question. Nothing in first century Judea was quite so hated and despised as was the Roman tax. It not only reminded the Jews that they were a subjugated people; it also represented a theological affront. To the Jew there was only one King, and that was God, not Caesar. Paying tribute to an earthly non-Jewish monarch was something that the Hebrews had opposed throughout their long history. But there was more. The dirty work of collecting the tax was done not by the Romans, but by collaborating Jews. To make matters worse, some of the money that they collected off the backs of their fellow countrymen stuck to their own fingers. We are told that Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector. That is the only time in the New Testament that that term is used. It meant that he was over an entire district. Zacchaeus may have been short in stature, but he had wealth and wealth means power, so, in a manner of speaking, people looked up to him. Zacchaeus was the little man with the big reputation. He was not just well to do.

But in many ways Zacchaeus was as poor as any man in Jericho. For all of his money he was a lonely man, he was an empty man. In the world of the flesh he had everything; in the world of the spirit he had nothing. The people, of course, looked upon him with complete contempt. He was cut off from communion with the community of God. There is symbolism in his title chief tax collector. That is another way of saying that he was not only a sinner, but a chief among sinners. Therefore, he was prevented from seeing Jesus that day, not only by the press of the crowd, but also due to social and religious ostracism

Most residents of the U.S. and Canada could be counted as wealthy by the world's standards. In terms of clean drinking water, available medicines and access to most social services, we definitely rate among the "haves." Confronting the 31 kinds of shampoo the 357 choices of wallpaper, we may indeed wonder if our material blessings haven't gone haywire. Can we justify dolls that have a larger vocabulary than some third-world children?

In any case, Zacchaeus's wealth marks him "one of us." His perch in the sycamore speaks of an aching familiar need. We may have bulging closets and cupboards, but our deeper hungers are often unsatisfied. In an era of unprecedented social change, job insecurity, economic meltdowns and escalating violence, the mood of many North Americans is one of anxiety. Because the latest gimmicks fail to calm deep--seated fears, we need to reach, like Zacchaeus, for a broader picture, a better answer--in short, a personal Savior.

It should delight us to see how Jesus can read even a posture of longing. He blesses this tree-climber before Zacchaeus ever says a word. Jesus' response far exceeds Zacchaeus's expectations. Zacchaeus wanted a glimpse; he got a guest.

Again, this divine generosity mirrors our experience. Those who venture even a step into regular prayer or the service of others voice a similar response. "I got much more than I gave."

Luke leaves it to our imaginations to fill in, what happened when Jesus got to Zacchaeus' house. It is not hard to picture a scene of table fellowship: wine goblets clinking and the fragrance of food.

Perhaps: is more difficult to extend that hospitality within our own faith community.

The table is the oldest altar of humanity; how do we share our table with the community around us? How do we share it with you?

By prayer, by singing praises, by offering and receiving forgiveness for the things we do wrong, by doing good works on behalf of people less fortunate than ourselves.

Living in our more secular world where Sundays are not focused on worshipping God, but on spending time and money on doing things we like, we might ask - how does coming to St. Mark's benefit me? In the mirror context, how can this community of St. Mark's benefit from your contribution.

How will coming here benefit you parents and spouses have learned how to continue to live and grow after the loss of a spouse or a child, we have intergenerational fellowship - grand-parents, parents and their children, we share food and meals together, we visit the sick and shut-ins, we support low income families with food..... we pray and praise together each week, we show god's love to each other all the time.... And we laugh together and have fun.

How would your presence benefit us? You will bring different life experiences, different questions, an addition to our pool of the resources of time, talent and money. You will have an opportunity to grow in your faith, to meet life's challenges, to become a better person as you learn the way that God has called you.

If you think you have all the answers, please come share them with us.

If you don't have all the answers, help us search for them together.

We pray...

- ❖ that Jesus might come into our lives and break down our hardness of heart
- ❖ for our brothers and sisters in Christ who suffer for their faith, that they might be strengthened by the hope of glory.
- ❖ that we might be given eyes to see and ears to hear the truth about our lives, that we may amend them according to the will of God.