

St. Columba's Episcopal Church
November 2, 2025 – All Saints' Sunday
Luke 19:1-10
The Rev. Dr. Susan Kraus

This morning's reading from the Gospel of Luke is a wonderful lesson for All Saints' Sunday because today we celebrate people whose lives have been visibly touched and changed by Jesus, some who have become "famous" in the church and many – perhaps most – who are known to only a few people, perhaps to God alone.

Zacchaeus "was a chief tax collector and was rich." I have spoken before about tax collectors. Beginning in Advent our lessons will be from the Gospel of Matthew, the apostle who had been a tax collector. Tax collectors worked for the Romans who occupied Judea, so they were despised by the Jews. They made their money by collecting the taxes due to Rome plus whatever extra they could squeeze out of the people. Chief tax collectors, like Zacchaeus, had other men working for them. He was like the boss of a protection racket. The fact that he was rich meant that he was "good" at what he did, a thug among thugs, a sinner among sinners, and not the sort of person we might expect to want to see Jesus so much that "he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him" as he was passing by.

We know that Jesus spotted Zacchaeus and made what sounds like a strange request: "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." When Jesus draws near to people, he calls for a response from them. Because of his encounter with Jesus Zacchaeus remembered who he was – a son of Abraham – and he changed his life to be in alignment with the teaching of God. He promised to make reparation for stealing from the people and offered to give half his wealth to the poor. "Today salvation has come to this house."

On All Saints' Sunday we remember people who have met the Lord and whose lives reveal what the Lord means to them, whose lives reveal the saving work of Jesus. Through the saints of the past and the saints we are privileged to know today we see Jesus at work in the world. The work is always the same – healing, feeding, teaching, offering compassionate care, serving others, loving God and our neighbors. And this work is costly – in body, mind, spirit and soul. It is the work and way of love. It is the work we are called to do, as saints of God and followers of Jesus.

I believe that anyone who sincerely tries to live in accordance with the life and teaching of Jesus knows how challenging that can be and how often we fail. Being a "saint" doesn't mean being perfect. No one "gets it right" like that.

This prayer of the famous Trappist monk, Thomas Merton, expresses well what many ordinary Christian people feel: "My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean

that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road" (In "Thoughts in Solitude").

Our times are dark, and the world is full of hatred and violence and lies, greed and misuse of power. The church can be a beacon of light in dark times. We don't hide from the reality of the forces of darkness. After all, what could be darker than the cross of Christ? We bear witness to the reality of the darkness. But we uphold the light of Christ, for what light could be brighter than the light of his resurrection?

It is important that we are here to proclaim the message that the light of Christ is never overcome by darkness, never. It is important that we gather together to remember that there is another way to live, not the way of the world but the way of love. It is important that we celebrate the saints, people whose lives have shown the love of God which is in their hearts – to celebrate them and to be inspired by them.

This church is like our base camp where we are strengthened and renewed to go into the world to live in love and light, to stand up for God's kingdom, to be faithful witnesses of Christ. The darker the times and the harder it is to live with love for our neighbors, the more we need to be a strong witness to God's way of love.

Jesus said to his followers, "You are the light of the world." We are all called to be saints, people who allow the love of God to shine through us as unhindered and as clearly as we can – wherever, whenever, and however we can, today and every day. In Jesus' name. Amen.