

# North Kildonan United Church

10 July 2022 ~Rev. Dr. Paul Campbell

## “Healing and Money”

*Luke 19*

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Technology is making such an amazing impact in our culture. So many profound changes surround us replacing what's familiar, modifying essential things. For example, at the grocery store a couple of days ago, I was standing in line behind an old guy, really old actually because he was older than me. He paid for his groceries by pulling up his sleeve and registering his watch on the scanner. He smiled. I felt a bit dizzy.

A couple of years ago, I rented a car in England with my grandson, 21 at the time. The company didn't have the modest sedan I ordered, so they set us up with a big Mercedes. First off, couldn't find where the key went. Sean's long arm stretch from back seat, pointed at it. We needed the windows lowered. I was clueless. Big arm from the back seat, on the button. Same thing happened with the turn signals, the windshield wipers, then the radio, later in the afternoon the headlights. I felt confused, felt stupid, unprepared, inadequate without Sean. Those of you over 55, do you ever imagine explaining everyday life to your departed parents? No hard cash, no letters in the mailbox, books available on a little screen, photos taken on your phone and sent within seconds by satellite to Australia or Hong Kong or Winkler? We gain benefit from and are challenged by deep changes in familiar things. What's next? Can you catch up? Keep up?

A student of Theology used technology recently to carry out a new study on the Bible. She was a talented person and created a computer program. She wanted to analyze and render down the essential teachings of Scripture. You know what she found out? Programming the old and New Testament? ONE THIRD of the Bible teaching have to do with healing. Also, ONE THIRD of the teachings of the Bible had to do with money. And, LESS than 1% of the teachings had to do with sex! (Are we surprised? Relieved? Disappointed?) The Science of research technology confirmed what is the essence of Faithful teaching. I suppose you could say the student's project confirmed what we know that the people of God as called upon to understand and contribute to the world's healing, AND also that the power in Money must be reckoned with. If you have any interested in professional sports, you will know that a new independent Golf league has opened up. It's run by middle Eastern billionaires, offering hugely wealth young pro golfers Millions of dollars for showing up to play. If you want to ponder the relentless power of greed in the human soul, you need look no further.... That golf prize money comes from the same area in the world where there are over 40 Million refugee people living in squalor.

Today we pay attention to a familiar story in Luke's Gospel: contributing wisdom about both Healing and Money. In the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke we read about Zacchaeus, a wealthy Senior tax agent. He is rich and powerful. He handles the community treasury. He is despised. He lives as an outsider in his neighborhood. Remember the story from Sunday School or previous visits? There is a rumor that the teacher Jesus is in his town of Jericho, and Zacchaeus is curious. Because he is a tiny guy he runs ahead of the crowd and climbs a tree to watch. Jesus spots Zacchaeus when he passes by, and tells the tax man to come down and tells him "I need to stay at your house!" A few minutes later in Zacchaeus' home, over a meal, the tax man undergoes a revolution of the heart. I choose to call it a conversion. Zacchaeus quickly admits that he has been a cheat and has taken advantage of many vulnerable neighbors. There is no prompting from Jesus, yet Zacchaeus confesses that he has been in the wrong, and promises to give half his property to the poor, and also will begin to repay FOUR TIMES value, to everyone he had cheated. Somehow, the visit from Jesus has freed him from His enslavement to MONEY. Zacchaeus' soul had become hard and sick, yet when Jesus comes to his house, he undertakes a path to heal the poverty of his neighbors. Thereby, Zacchaeus is healed himself.

We don't know how Jesus came to pick out the man in the tree. We don't know why Jesus kind of ignored the crowd outside who scolded Jesus for visiting a sinner. We do know that after that visit, Zacchaeus was no longer an agent of cheating or dishonesty. He is a new person. Healed. I would like to underline it: this is a powerful story of conversion. Because not only did Zacchaeus heal in his heart, he began to overturn a corrupt and evil system that oppressed the people of Jericho. I call this a conversion, and that word makes us think of another man who met Jesus: Nicodemus. His story in John's gospel has been a favorite to use to describe spiritual conversion. But I would argue that with Nicodemus, yes his heart was moved, but his conversion did nothing to heal the brokenness of his community. Imagine: what if Christians decided that the actions of Zacchaeus were our true model of conversion. Zacchaeus' conversion is potentially earth changing. You could even suggest it's very disruptive, even dangerous because there was so much more than a change at heart at stake. Old Nicodemus was a sweet faithful leader with a warm heart, but his blessed conversion did little to contribute to the justice and healing in the world. Zacchaeus' conversion is a model that leads to justice and healing.

Many years ago, I had a challenging conversation with a good friend whose name was Randy. Randy was a tax man. Worked for Revenue Canada. When Randy had first heard a sermon about Zacchaeus, he told me he felt no choice but to quit his job. But in conversation he came to realize that the problem with Zacchaeus wasn't his job, it was his personal slavery to money. We ought to feel proud to pay taxes to Manitoba and to our country for the privileges and comforts of living here. Randy was not evil

for being a tax collector, and that wasn't Zacchaeus' sin either. There's no evidence that Zacchaeus even quit his job. Taxes are necessary, then and now. It's just that his access to money made him personally crazy and greedy, miserable and cold. Money made him ill: socially and spiritually.

I suppose there may be other good Bible stories illustrating that healing and money are absolutely central themes for following a life of faith. And I am grateful to the student of Theology in Toronto that has brought this truth to our attention.

I began by suggesting that so many changes to our everyday life are challenging, and often disturbing. Essential things change so quickly we don't have the time to evaluate whether or not these are life giving gifts, or just life changing benefits to those who are privileged.

Besides the technological changes in our world, we face the deep need for healing in our world in other places. I am thinking of the increasing longing for reconciliation amongst the dominant leaders of this continent with the original inhabitants. One small gesture is more public declarations about respect for Treaties that we proclaim. Zacchaeus is a lively role model to guide us into a future where greed can be overcome, and healing made a priority. Healing that involves the heart, the imagination, the purse and wallet.

What else is crying out for healing? How about Mother Earth and her need for radical healing? This past week, the newspaper quoted the general Secretary of the United Nations who laid out this essential challenge to us: regarding the disastrous abuse of the planet:

Antonio Guterres has said: *"we have no more time for empty promises. I call on all investors to align their entire lending portfolio with the Paris Agreement by 2024, ending all high-emissions finance. Every country, city, citizen, and company has a role to play."* Solutions and healing are anything but easy, but the consequences for people of faith, are real.

We have the company of Zacchaeus' story to brighten our spirits as we plan for healing in our personal lives and as we pay attention to our fragile world. Jesus invited himself to visit a house in Jericho one day, and before he left, a program was in place that had shifted greed to justice and shifted smugness to mercy. And just so we know of Jesus' disposition towards this healing event, he had said: *"Today, Salvation has come to this house."* Jesus used the word salvation to describe the healing of Zacchaeus' heart and the merciful change in his business.

Zacchaeus' heart had died at the altar of money, but having Jesus in his home healed his captivity to money. God bless us in our challenges to handle our richness. May God's resurrecting spirit increase love and mercy in our lives.