

“Doing whatever it takes: Climbing the Tree of Change”

Sermon by Dan Harrison (10/22/17)

Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town.² There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich. ³ He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way. ⁵ When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. “Zacchaeus!” he said. “Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today.” ⁶ Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. ⁷ But the people were displeased. “He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner,” they grumbled. ⁸ Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, “I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!” ⁹ Jesus responded, “Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.” Luke 19:1-10 (NLT)

- I. The dream, the goal!
- II. Where I am today is not where I *want* to be. (Was Zacchaeus, as the chief tax collector or chief sinner, where he wanted to be?)
 - a. **Abraham Lincoln** – experienced a long list of failures before winning 1860 presidency:
 - 1832 - Lost Job, defeated for state legislature
 - 1833 - Business he started fails
 - 1835 - Personal love (Ann Rutledge) dies
 - 1836 - Suffers from nervous breakdown
 - 1838 - Defeated after running for Illinois House Speaker
 - 1843 - Defeated in nomination for Congress
 - 1848 - Lost re-nomination for Congress
 - 1854 - Defeated in his run for Senate, 1854
 - 1856 - Defeated in his nomination for vice president, 1856
 - 1858 - Defeated in run for Senate
 - b. **Michael Jordan** – (from Huffington Post’s Scott Steinberg 1/15/15): (MJ) was put on second string by his high school basketball team because the coach told him he wasn’t tall enough to play. It was a moment deeply imprinted on Michael’s life. He stared at the alphabetically arranged list of names that made the team, feeling sure his coach had mistakenly left his name out. He was so disappointed and ashamed, he wept when he got home that day. Fortunately, his mother came to his side and gave him some important advice. “She said that the best thing I could do is to prove to the coach that he

had made a mistake,” recalled Michael, who added, “leaving my disappointment behind, I started to improve my performance.”

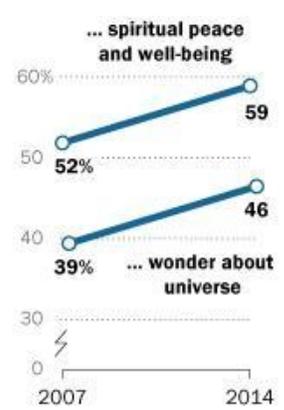
- c. **J.K. Rowling** – commencement @ Harvard University in 2008: “Failure meant a stripping away of the essential. I stopped pretending to myself that I was anything other than what I was, and I began to direct all my energies to finishing the only work that mattered to me. Had I really succeeded at anything else, I might never have found the determination to succeed in the one area where I truly belonged. I was set free, because my greatest fear had been realized, and I was still alive... and so rock bottom became a solid foundation on which I rebuilt my life.”

III. Why was Zacchaeus in the tree in the first place?

- a. It’s less about stature and more about what is going on internally: **A desire for change.**
 - i. **Personality change?** Hudson and Fraley’s 2015 study “Volitional Personality Trait Change: Can people choose to change their personality traits?”, (*Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*) concluded that “A vast majority of people want to change at least some aspects of their personality traits (Hudson & Roberts, 2014). For example, Hudson and Roberts (2014) found that, on the low end, more than 87% of their participants reported wanting to become more extroverted than they were at the time—and on the high end, over 97% expressed desires to increase in conscientiousness. Indeed, contemporary Americans spend tens of billions of dollars each year on self-help books and programs that promise increases in personality traits such as sociability, emotional stability, and productivity (Linder, 2009).”
 - ii. **Career change?** Reuters Report 7/1/13 – reported “Nearly 80 percent of workers in their 20s said they wanted to change careers, followed by 64 percent of 30-somethings and 54 percent in their 40s.”
 - iii. **Spirituality change?** Pew research → looking over a span of 7 years, identified positive trends towards increased spirituality in Americans (2007&2014). People are on a trajectory towards God, a greater understanding of the mysteries beyond. People want spiritual change in their lives. How many of us can say the same about ourselves?

Growing share of people regularly feel spiritual peace, sense of wonder

% who feel a deep sense of ... at least once a week



Source: Surveys conducted May 8-Aug. 13, 2007, and June 4-Sept. 30, 2014.

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IV. σωτηρία (sōtēria) – **salvation**: “Salvation has come to this house today.” Definition - *Deliverance, preservation, safety, health. A festive entertainment given upon a person's recovery from illness or escape from danger.*

- a. Sinners did not have a place in the religious circle Jesus’ day, Luke 18:9-13: ⁹To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week and

give a tenth of all I get.' ¹³“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

- b. **Jesus bridged the gap, Luke 18:14:** ¹⁴“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”
- v. **Don't give up on yourself, it's worth it! (Oh, and don't wait for others to change; it starts with us)** “We but mirror the world. All the tendencies present in the outer world are to be found in the world of our body. If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him. This is the divine mystery supreme. A wonderful thing it is and the source of our happiness. We need not wait to see what others do.” – Mahatma Gandhi