

## **“Hunting For A Treasure Beyond Measure”**

### **Luke 19:1-10**

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it.

A man was there named Zacchaeus;  
he was a chief tax collector and was rich.

He was trying to see who Jesus was,  
but on account of the crowd he could not,  
because he was short in stature.

So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him,  
because he was going to pass that way.

When Jesus came to the place,  
he looked up and said to him,  
“Zacchaeus, hurry and come down;  
for I must stay at your house today.”

So Zacchaeus hurried down and was happy to welcome Jesus.

But all who saw this began to grumble and said,  
“He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.”

Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord,  
“Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor;  
and if I have defrauded anyone of anything,  
I will pay back four times as much.”

Then Jesus said to him,  
“Today salvation has come to this house,  
because he too is a child of Abraham.

For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”

# Hunting For A Treasure Beyond Measure

Luke 19:1-10

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## I.

I know that Halloween has come and gone, but when I sat down to write the sermon it was Halloween morning so Halloween was what was on my mind. As you may have already surmised, Halloween is by far my favorite day of the year. More so than Thanksgiving, or Christmas, or my birthday, the opening of bass season...*even* my anniversary (though a very close 2nd). The first year we moved to town, I was so excited for Halloween I spent hours getting the manse ready. I had speakers in the 2nd floor window playing spooky music, there were decorations in the windows, spiderwebs hanging from the roof, orange bulbs in the lights and on the porch I had a table all laid out with hot, mulled cider and treats. Then, as night began to fall, I put on this great costume, sat on the front porch and waited for the fun to begin, on this, the *best* day of the year.

## II.

I think we had a total of 4 trick or treaters that first Halloween. Three of whom were kids from church and sort of had an obligation to come. Turns out the Presbyterian Church manse doesn't get a lot of foot traffic on Halloween. Which, if you think about it, makes a lot of sense. The goal that night is to maximize the intake, which means visiting the greatest number of houses over the least amount of distance. Hence, walking all the way across the park just for *one* house is...inefficient. Also, unbeknownst to me at that point but as I later discovered, the real Miracle Mile in Canton on Halloween night is Judson Street. Residents there claim to have to budget up to \$200 for Halloween candy each year. Car and van loads pull in from the places like Russell, Edward, and Morley to disgorge scores of ghosts, witches, and facsimiles of all the latest TV and movie characters.

## III.

My fondness for Halloween, though, goes *way* back to when I was a kid. Each year my grandmother, Adele, would host a treasure hunt for all of her grandkids and some of the local neighbor kids. My mother, Nancy, was the mastermind behind the whole shindig. She would spend days manufacturing

the clues, usually written on sheets cut from brown paper bags with the edges burned all around the edges. These would lead the band of treasure seekers on a mad-capped meander from leaf pile, to crook of tree, to neighbor's house as each clue would dictate. Talk about a competition! The hunt would take place immediately following Trick or Treating, with all the families converging on Gramma's house. With the kids already amped up on candy it didn't take very much hollering and shrieking on the part of my mother to get everyone good and riled up.

#### **IV.**

The "treasure chest" was always the same: a wooden crate covered with tinfoil. Inside was a sucker for each kid wrapped in a tissue tied with a piece of yarn to resemble a ghost with a one dollar bill stuck under the yarn. After the hunt was over, which could last anywhere from 15 to 45 minutes, we would all head back to gramma's house for cider and donuts. It was great fun, and the best day of the year.

Now, "great fun" and "the best day of the year" are not phrases we would normally utilize when speaking of Pledge Sunday. In fact, many church folks consider Stewardship time to be a real bummer. A bummer to undertake the mailings, a bummer to speak about on Sundays, a bummer to get that letter, and a bummer to sit down with yourself, or your spouse, and decide just how much one intends to support the church in the coming year with their pledge.

#### **V.**

By way of explanation, then, the annual Fall Stewardship Drive is simply a matter of trick or treating on Judson Street; a matter of efficiency and budgeting. If you are connected to the church, or if you live on Judson Street, this is part of what it means to make your home here. It makes sense, then, to budget for it. The best way for us to budget what we as a church *can* spend is to determine what we anticipate having on hand *to* spend. Hence the request for a simple, non-binding pledge, that we might have a *rough* idea of the amount with which we have to work each year. Because unlike the residents of Judson Street we cannot simply turn off the porch light when we run out of candy.

## VI.

Ours is a 24/7, 365 day a year enterprise. There is no trick to ministry. We do the best we can, as long as we can, treating the bus loads of people who come to us *throughout* the year seeking comfort, support, solace, and inspiration with the best worship, fellowship, preaching, pastoral care, and mission endeavors we can afford. That we can do all these things each year, every year, is simply of function of *your* generosity and faith.

Generosity and faith is really what today's scripture passage from Luke 19 is all about. Here we have the story of Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector. A little man both in stature and respect, who climbed up in that sycamore tree the day Jesus came to town in order that he might, as the song goes, see what he would see. What Zacchaeus saw that day was the much heralded Jesus. The teacher, healer, and caster out of demons who just happened to invite himself to stay at *Zacchaeus'* house that evening. Here in the story we read that Zacchaeus hurried down the sycamore tree and was happy to welcome Jesus into his home.

## VII.

Ah, but people didn't like this kind of thing. They didn't like their champion taking up with a sinner, the chief tax collector no less, despised mightily by one and all. Zacchaeus, though, in a baffling turn of events, has this sudden "ah-ha" moment. He finds a faith about just *who* Jesus is and *what* Jesus is *about*. Then, moved by a spirit of generosity, declares that he is giving half all his possessions to the poor and will atone to anyone he has defrauded four times over. Not a bad result for a stewardship drive considering all Jesus did was invite himself over for dinner.

## VIII.

Well, this morning Jesus has invited himself to *our* house to share a meal that we have prepared to celebrate the grace that he has provided. Like Zacchaeus we have heard and responded to Jesus invitation to dwell with us here on the Park. We too have climbed down each week from our busy lives, from our own private sycamore trees, and come here today for worship, to see what *we* might see. Like Zacchaeus, we too are sinners. Folks who make mistakes, who take the long way around, the hard way, fumbling, stumbling, all skinned knees and bruised elbows, doing the best we can with what we

have, learning, growing, trusting, sharing and caring. Folks who are *well* aware that we don't always get it right, and generously welcome those who don't always get it right either. Folks who have the faith that the Son of Man came to seek out and save the lost just like us.

## **IX.**

On a day such as today, when we celebrate Communion and culminate our stewardship drive, I have within me a feeling quite similar to those halloween nights of my childhood: a great delight that the treasure has been found. A treasure which has been there all the time, prepared and intended for all to share. We just had to work our way to it. Because the journey of faith is a treasure hunt beyond measure. Thank you so much for all that you do to make sure that the treasure that is this church continues on another year, and that the hope of the Gospel of Jesus Christ which resides here is discovered and shared by all. Amen.