

THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF LUTHERAN CHURCH OF THE CROSS –LUKE 19:1-10 – OCTOBER 18, 2020
The Confirmation of Tamirat and Tegegn Dablke; and the First Communion of Nate Williamson
IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE ✠ SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AMEN.

*Blessed are the **pure** in heart, says Jesus, for they shall see God. (Matthew 5:8)*

Now, *there was a man named **Zacchaeus**, whose name means **pure**, and he was seeking to see Jesus, (Luke 19:2-3)*

*And yet because of the **crowds** he could not, so he climbed up into a **tree**, for Jesus was about to **pass that way**. (Luke 19:3-4)*

The Holy Church would remind you today, O Christian, what all of this is for, and what all of this is about.

For the Church and her Christians *seek to see Jesus*, to rise above the clamor of the crowds, and to find Him in the Tree.

That is our entire life. Everything else serves this life, and is formed by it, for indeed without it, nothing else matters.

Yes, it's all about seeing Jesus. It's about the One who must be seen beyond the noise of this crowded world.

It's about Him who can only be seen through the Tree, through the Cross. It's about the One Who is passing this way,

Who comes to abide in this holy house, to eat and to drink with sinners, and so to seek and to save the lost. (Luke 19:10)

It's all about seeing Jesus. Yet so often we get distracted, our eyes begin to wander, and we'd rather see something else.

Perhaps we'd like to see ourselves, maybe Church is really just about being nice, doing good things, making good friends.

Or perhaps we'd like to see some change, maybe we can end poverty, defeat racism, cure cancer, or win the White House.

Yes, so often we get distracted, and it isn't hard for the church, no matter how many anniversaries she celebrates,

it isn't hard for the church to lose sight of Jesus, and to settle instead for just a glimpse of Him beyond the crowd.

And of course, that struggle, that distraction, is not just a force and issue within the Church, but in this world.

You know these things. You know that the world hates Jesus seen from the tree. They call you to come down from there.

They say, don't go looking for Jesus up there, no, stay down here with us, for just who do you think you are?

Do you think you know something that we don't? Why get all high and mighty trying climb up there? Come down.

Instead, O Church, says the world, learn strike a good balance between rigid orthodoxy and sensible compromise.

For isn't the Church about the people, why do you strain so much to see Jesus, why not see your neighbor instead?

Look, you don't need to climb any trees, you can just get a glimpse with the rest of us, as He passes by.

But a glimpse won't do. This is what Zacchaeus knows. He needs to get above the crowd. He must go higher.

What this world offers is not enough, what it thinks it knows is actually nothing, the clamor of the crowd is nonsense.

You cannot know and see Christ on your own, not by your feelings, or your reason, or anything this world offers.

You must go higher, indeed, the heavens must drop down to you, the Lord must speak, the Spirit must preach.

And so Zacchaeus climbs, he tosses the scorn of the world to the wind, he cares not about the jeers from the crowd.

He is, and so is the Church, a fool for Christ, a man small in this world, yet rich and great in the things of God.

O Church, learn and practice this wisdom. What you truly need, cannot be found in this noisy and clamoring crowd.

You must go higher, the heavens must drop down, you need what the Lord sends, you need wisdom from on high.

Yes, a glimpse won't do. For if you would see Jesus, you must also hear Jesus. For Him who is found in the Tree, speaks.

Up above the clamoring crowd, there in the tree, our Lord comes and opens His mouth for Zacchaeus.

That is the Christ. The One found in the Tree, the One seen in His Word. Yes, nothing else will do. Even beautiful crucifixes, adorning the Lord's altar, are nothing, if the Church is not found in Christ who speaks. A glimpse won't do. An image of Jesus is not enough. A friendly picture of the Lord in your mind's eye is nothing.

The Church seeks to see Jesus, and she sees Him in the Tree, in the Cross, through His life-giving Word. Otherwise, what would you know? What would be certain? Why would you come here? And what would you believe? Yes, the world, the devil, and your own fallen flesh, tempts you daily with the ease and comfort of a mute Jesus. They would urge you to silence the Lord, close up your ears, treat doctrine as if it's a disease, and to follow your heart.

Yet how would Zacchaeus know to come down, to receive the Lord into his home, to eat with Him, if He did not speak? How would you, O Christian, know where to run, to flee for mercy, to have your sins forgiven, if He did not speak? Come and be found in the Tree far above the crowds. Come and be found in a Church that takes the Lord at His Word.

What are you? Thanks be to God, you are Zacchaeus. Small in this world, likely to be hated, persecuted, and mocked. You know and feel your smallness, and thanks be to God for that. So you confess your sins, you know that this world, this crowd is not your home and not your family. You know to seek that which is above, to seek the Lord on the Cross, to find Him who speaks, to eat and drink with Him at His holy house, and at the last, to go with Him on His Way.

The Church that seeks to see Jesus may not always get to celebrate many anniversaries on this side of glory. For she who refuses to go with the clamoring crowd of this world, may go the way of the cross, much sooner than most. So entire congregations have been cut down in the Roman Colosseum, and the death camps of Communist China. So too have churches been shuttered and doors closed in the midst of flourishing US neighborhoods hostile to Christ.

We give thanks, and rightly today, for the Lord's grace to gather the saints in this place for 60 years. At the same time, as we look to tomorrow, and more pressing, as we look soon to the altar, our prayer is not for 60 more years, our prayer is that the Lord would keep us faithful come what may.

Seek to see Jesus. Confess Him who is known only through the Tree of the Cross, by the Word of His mouth. Remain faithful. Contend for pure and right doctrine. Defend the faith. Make the good confession. Should the doors close in a month or in 60 years, so be it. Worry not. For the Lord is good, He will do all things well.

Yes, we give thanks for 60 years today. But we also give thanks that these anniversaries will not last forever. The Lord is passing by. He is going on ahead. As good as it is in this holy House, He is bringing you that which is better.

Thanks be to God that one day there will be no more anniversaries, that we will be with the Lord, that the crowd will be silenced by the Word made flesh, rising in the East, that this fight will be over, and our rest, won. O Christian, He is coming soon. So, lift up your hearts. See the Lord. Here, from the tree He bids you home.

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