

Hospitality and Hope

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Before our scripture reading, I had the privilege of just introducing our speaker, our preacher today.

My friends Cindy and Paul Shuler are here today, and they moved here to Berkeley about a year and a half ago to start Reformed University Fellowship International, ministering to visiting scholars from all over the world.

And have come to be fellow missionaries in Berkeley, and it's such a joy to have these friends among us and just to have a pastor pal to go walk with Paul on a regular basis.

They've ministered in various churches and church planting settings in Seattle and San Luis Obispo and Hawaii, and now their home is here with us in Berkeley.

[1 : 17] So let's continue to stand for this scripture reading from the Gospel of Luke. Today our scripture reading is from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 19, verses 1 through 10, as printed in the liturgy.

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was wealthy.

He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short, he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today. So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

All the people saw this and began to mutter, He has gone to be the guest of a sinner. But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, Look, Lord, here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.

[2 : 28] Jesus said to him, Today's salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

This is the gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, Lord Christ. Good morning. It's great to be here with you. And we're really grateful for your partnership and Jonathan's friendship over the years.

And so it's wonderful to be here opening the word this morning. The title of the message today is Hospitality and Hope.

And both of those words are H words. And they're both beautiful on their own. Hospitality is a beautiful word and hope.

But when you combine them, when you marry them, they become a phenomenal couple. And really very, very powerful.

[3 : 31] Over the past year and a half, as Jonathan was mentioning, Sin and I have been experiencing that. Hospitality and hope. Here in Berkeley, we've been able to partner, privileged to partner with churches, Christ Church and many other churches and individuals, kind of on the frontier of hospitality, welcoming people who come here from all over the world and opening up our home and our lives and partnering with churches about that.

And I just want to report to you, you know, from the front lines, when you do this, when you take the risk and say yes and open up your home and your life, it's really a place of profound miracles.

Amazing things happen. Stunning surprises. One of my mentors in international student ministry is a guy named Al LeCour.

He founded RUF International about 25 years ago. And he has this quote. He says, Hospitality opens doors that let the future in.

And so when you say yes to hospitality and you open your door and a guest comes in, it's not just a guest that is coming in. God's future comes rushing in.

[5 : 07] God's new creation comes in and it's, you know, hospitality is so, like, tangible and visible and edible. It's stunning.

And it's simple but very profound. There will be times over the last year and a half where Cindy and I maybe have one or two or five or ten folks over to our house for dinner.

And we'll, you know, end the time and send them off, close the door. And as we're doing dishes and just processing, we'll just say, you know, that's heaven right here.

We just got a taste of heaven. And we'll just go to the kingdom of God. And we'll just go to the kingdom of God. And we'll just go to the kingdom of God around our table, in our living room or in our car.

And this makes sense because God's future in the Bible is most often pictured as a feast of the nations with Jesus at the center.

[6 : 16] And so hospitality, when you do that, the future comes rushing in. And hospitality is a foretaste. It's a little feast pointing to the big feast that's coming.

And because of that, it is so tasty. It's just very, very rich. Esther Meek is a Christian philosopher. And she has a great online talk about feasting.

And one of the sidelines, just side comments she made, she says, have you ever noticed that hospitality does an end run around the need for apologetics, a need to defend the faith, right?

Often that's true because in hospitality, hospitality, you start to melt. Barriers come down. And around a table, hidden longings are awakened.

The passage that we're looking at here from Luke is pretty familiar. I grew up in Sunday school. And in that day, they had flannel graphs.

[7 : 30] I don't know if you remember that, these flannel things and the cutout of Zacchaeus Zacchaeus and the tree and Jesus. And Zacchaeus would, you know, had a teacher named Mrs. Bissell.

Mrs. Bissell would pull that down and Zacchaeus coming down. And it's a great kid's story. Because kids are short and they can't see and they like to run and climb trees, right?

But there's a lot more going on in this than just a kid's story. So this morning, I just want to walk through a verse at a time. It's only 10 verses.

It's not too long. And unpack this. And Jesus is modeling hospitality for us here. And we have a lot that we can learn from him.

And what happened then happens now. And this is a passage that we can do. We can practice. So verse 1. We'll just start there.

[8 : 29] Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. Now, Jericho is pretty famous. Ancient city. It's a beautiful city.

Surrounded. There's all these springs. So full of palm trees, rose gardens. King Herod had his summer palace there.

So it's kind of like a resort. Sort of like Santa Barbara or something. Very prosperous. Great place to be a tax collector. And of course, in the Bible, Jericho has a lot of significance too.

It's the place. It's the city where the Israelites came as they're entering the promised land. And Joshua led them. And if you remember the story, they marched around seven times.

And then the walls came tumbling down. Right? After that. And it's the place where Rahab, who was a prostitute living in the city there, hid the spies.

[9 : 33] And she was rescued. And was brought into the covenant with Israel. And if you look in Matthew, the genealogy of Jesus, she's one of the great, great, great, great, great, great grandmothers of our Lord Jesus Christ and is included in.

And the name Jesus is Joshua in Hebrew. Yeshua. So here in this passage, you have the new Joshua coming into Jericho.

And it just raises the, the text raises the question, invites us to reflect on, okay, when this new Joshua comes in, what walls are going to be coming down?

Right? And who are the new rescues? Who's the new Rahab? And that leads to verse two. Verse two is this.

A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. And names in the Bible are very important.

[10:41] So it's always good to just look up what they mean. The name Zacchaeus means pure or innocent. And you just go, hmm. A guy named pure and innocent is the chief tax collector.

There's a major disconnect going on here. Tax collectors, we're not nice people. He was Jewish. He's working for the Roman occupiers.

He's skimming off a lot for himself. He was a corrupt traitor. A greedy, selfish guy. And he's the chief tax collector.

So he's good at what he does. He's had a lot of practice. He's maybe like the mob boss. And his neighbors would speak with disdain.

Maybe under their breath. But I cannot wait until Zacchaeus gets what's coming to him. So here's Zacchaeus and Jesus. And yet something is going on with Zacchaeus.

[11:51] And God is at work in his life. His story's not over. There's surprising stuff happening in this guy. And that's where we read verse 3.

He wanted to see who Jesus was. But because he was short, he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore fig tree to see him since Jesus was coming that way.

This is great storytelling. It's just full of kind of surprising wonders. Something's going on with Zacchaeus. I kind of think of pictures of Zacchaeus as like a Danny DeVito.

You know, short, stocky guy. Maybe a little overweight. He's wealthy. So, but he's, you know, so to have him go and run and climb a tree.

What's going on with him? And I love working with RUF International, the group that we're part of. In every training that we do, a couple trainings a year, we go and we're with campus ministers from around the country.

[12:58] And the thing that they emphasize over and over and over is kind of every meeting, every, their motto. Remember, God is at work. Right?

You're going to go all this, there's 500 of you going out to these different campuses around the country. Just remember, it's not up to you.

God's already there. God's doing stuff. He's at work. When we moved to Berkeley a year and a half ago, we, okay, here we are. What do we do?

Who's going to come? What happens when they do? And it's just been so thrilling to see God already at work.

We met a couple at a mid-autumn festival cultural event from China. And he is a postdoc scholar in computer science.

[13:58] And she is a postdoc scholar in physics. So I had him over for dinner. And as we started talking around the table, eventually, you know, just our conversation, it led to, you know, we don't really know any Christians except, you know, my mother is kind of a closet Christian.

And she couldn't practice because her husband, you know, didn't let her. She couldn't teach us. But when we came to the U.S. and she was sending us off, she pulled us aside and she prayed for us. And she said, and I remember when I was young, she taught me one verse, you know, and it was John 3.16. So here she is. And all of a sudden, this person is around our table.

God obviously at work. And it's easy to get intimidated by hospitality because it's uncertain and unknown and you're not sure what do I say.

And I just want to encourage you. God is at work. He's way ahead of you. He loves this stuff. Don't worry. Don't be afraid. Don't let that stop you.

[15:18] And God is full of surprises. And you see that in Zacchaeus. It's surprising urgency that he has to see Jesus. It's surprising humility that he would climb a tree.

It's surprising new openness. Another important thing to notice right here in verse 4 is that Zacchaeus, Luke tells us, climbs a sycamore fig tree.

Not just, well, why would he, what's that about? Not just any old tree. If you go back a few chapters in Luke 13, a sycamore fig tree specifically is this kind of tree that Jesus cursed.

It was a symbol of unfaithful Israel. It was a symbol of unfaithful, unfruitful. And Jesus curses it. But here, he comes to the same sycamore fig tree.

And Jesus is picking this one ripe fruit. Sycamore figs are fascinating. They're kind of a unique fruit. They only ripen.

[16 : 25] If you just leave them there, they rot and they fall to the ground. You cannot eat them. They're no good. The only way you become sweet is if you hit them. Or you poke them.

Or you whack them, you know. And so they had people who were like fig whackers. That was their job. And so here's this guy up with a bunch of figs.

And God has a work in his life. And the question again is, you know, and that's, how is Jesus going to whack this guy? So that he's going to become fruitful.

And that's the question for us too. Verse 5. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus, come down immediately. Finally, I must stay at your house today.

He's so playful. So hopeful. Jesus stops. He does that a lot with crowds. He stops and notices. But here it's just like Zacchaeus, I see you, you know.

[17 : 30] And there's a pretty basic lesson here for, if you want to welcome someone, you have to be able to see them first. And most of the time, a lot of us, we just, we miss the party because we're not, we're just focused into ourselves.

Right? Maybe we're just too much on our phone. We don't even see anybody. So Zacchaeus is looking down at Jesus. And Jesus stops and he's looking at him. And they make a connection, their recognition.

And it's probably shocking for Zacchaeus. I'm sure he wasn't, he was climbing up there, he wanted to be incognito, hide behind the branches, and just kind of observe for a distance. But Jesus doesn't just see him.

And this is very, very crucial. Jesus sees him with eyes of hope. Right? It's not just, oh, I notice you. And he calls him by name.

He doesn't just say, you know, you filthy scumbag traitor collaborator, get down here. He says, Zacchaeus, pure innocent one.

[18 : 44] He sees him with hope and he names him with hope. One night around our table, we were having a discussion with students about names and what names mean, their names mean.

And one of the students, who's really anxious and fearful, he said, my name means brave. And there was a woman who had struggled a lot and gone through a lot of sorrow.

And, you know, she said, my name means blossoming branch. And another young woman who had been through a lot of abuse, she said, my name means radiant princess.

And Cindy and I just kind of struck us like, wow. You know, to be able to pray hopefully and know names is so, so powerful.

To be known, to be seen with hope. And I just want to kind of throw something out, an invitation for Christ Church.

[19 : 51] What if this fall, maybe you even started thinking about now, you just said, you know, there's a bunch of international students. There's 10,000 every year that come to Berkeley.

What if I just started praying about opening my home to one person in the fall. And maybe trying to find out I can help you do that, others.

And maybe get a map of the world and put it on a piece of styrofoam or something. Have somebody over for lunch or dinner and say, where in the world are you from?

And put a little pin on the map. And what does your name mean? And I guarantee you, if you do that, right, it would be transformational.

For you and for them. You know, 85% of international students that come to the United States never get into an American home of any kind.

[20 : 55] So that's, you know, a million around, over a million every year come. That means like 850,000 of those go back without ever being in an American home.

And a cow, you know, so 10,000, that means 8,500 or so. Come, stay maybe three, four years. Leave never having had that hospitality experience.

To me, that's both a travesty. Very sad. And a super opportunity for the church. Back to Zacchaeus. A lot of people in this crowd are probably thinking, finally, he's going to be called out.

Jesus sees him. He's going to call him down. He's going to get what he deserves. He's going to get nailed. He says, Zacchaeus, come down immediately.

You know, when someone says that, you're in big trouble if your parents say, come here immediately. But here's the twist. And I love this. Jesus says, Zacchaeus, I must stay at your house today.

[22 : 04] I would be honored, Zacchaeus, to sit at your table. And the shockwaves of Jesus doing that still rippled throughout the world, right?

Who Jesus says he's going to eat with, right, is huge. There's a podcast, I don't know if you've heard it, called Ear Hustle. It's from San Quentin.

These guys in San Quentin talk about prison life. And one of the episodes, they talk about who you eat with in prison is huge. And you only eat with your particular racial group.

It's very important. And if you're mixed race, you have to decide. You have to make a decision. Who's going to be your table? Because who you eat with is who your people are.

This is my people. These are not my people. And Jesus, by saying this one-liner, I must stay at your house, he's disrupting and rearranging the social structures.

[23 : 08] And you can just hear the future rushing in. As the story of the New Testament unfolds, that whole thing of who's eating with whom becomes the way the kingdom of God dramatically is spread.

So Jesus whacks Zacchaeus with hospitality, with kindness. He's whacked by grace. He's whacked by grace. Similar to the prodigal son.

You know, he changes everything. And gives him a taste of the future. Verse 6. So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

So there's joy in Zacchaeus' house. A new kind of joy. The walls are falling down. The future is rushing in. Zacchaeus is being rescued. And Zacchaeus is not the only one shocked.

Verse 7. All the people saw this and began to mutter. He has gone to be the guest of a sinner. And of course you would mutter. Right? It's very understandable.

[24 : 10] The whole world is shifting. Your whole social strata is shifting right in front of your eyes. And they have kind of eschatological jet lag here.

They haven't figured it out. There's a proper way for Zacchaeus to be reconciled and welcomed. You go to the temple. You talk to the priest. You confess. You sacrifice.

You make resitution. There's procedures and protocol. So what's going on here then? Jesus is coming in. He's saying, I am the new temple. Right?

I am the new sacrifice. I am the new priest who can pronounce forgiveness and salvation. All this reconciliation happens immediately through Jesus.

And we see it happen in verse 8. But Zacchaeus stood up. He's sitting around the table. And he said, I have something to say. And said to the Lord, look, Lord.

[25 : 09] Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount. So Jesus picks this fruit off the sycamore tree.

And it turns out it's ripe. It's ripe and it's very sweet. And juicy. And the first words that come out of Zacchaeus mouth are, you know, the gospel.

He's proclaiming good news to the poor. Freedom for the captives. Jubilee comes rushing in. Jesus is on the loose through Zacchaeus.

And the good work that God started to do as Zacchaeus was running to the tree to see Jesus, he continues to do now that he's in his house.

And his curiosity turns into joyful generosity. He's changed. Right? Through an encounter with Jesus around a table. And the scene has this sense of wonder.

[26 : 12] Like dead Lazarus. Jesus says, Lazarus, come forth out of the grave. And here he says, Zacchaeus, come down from the tree. And he's alive. He's clothed and in his right mind.

And hospitality leads to hope. And the world that we all long for, you start to see glimpses of around this table. God's future. Brokenness does not win.

People can change. And Jesus said to him, today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a son of Abraham. This is a royal pronouncement here and now.

We do this prayer when we say grace. These friends of ours introduced us to this prayer. And, you know, you have plates around the table. And we have everybody hold up their plate.

And we just say, and this could be a table of all kinds of people, different, you know, religious backgrounds, different levels of belief. And we just say, from the king, to the king, for the king, with the king.

[27 : 24] And we do that every time. And often I just stop and look around the table. And there's this invoking Jesus. There's this sense of wonder.

It's like, what did we just say? Right? What did I just say? Who's at this dinner? Anyway, what's going on here?

What kind of table is this? I want to show you. You could show it. There's a picture, a slide. Right here.

Yeah. This is one of my favorite pictures from this last year. This is a baptism from this last March. And you might recognize Amy is there translating.

You know, and Hana Joy, her ear. And David and his mother-in-law were baptized from China. And last year, when we first, January 2023, we first moved to the area.

[28 : 28] We had hardly just gotten, just starting to unpack and everything. We got this email from a friend that said, you know, you're just starting and feel free to say no. But there's a couple that's coming from Beijing.

And would you welcome them? They need a place to stay. We have a little guest apartment that we were fixing up. And so we, you know, so we really need to do this.

We were just struck by that. And, you know, we picked them up at the airport. And they have two cats. Right?

So these cats. And, but around our table for several days, we just, you know, from the king to the king, for the king, with the king, which led to lots of conversations.

And God, it turned out, was really at work in their lives. She, Summer, the wife, had become a Christian in China. And her husband was not yet.

[29 : 29] And when they got married, he saw his job as to try to convince her not to be a Christian, to prove it all false. And it turns out they were really coming to the U.S. in many ways to get a new start and to save their marriage.

And so around the table, you know, and in different conversations with different people.

But anyway, last Easter, Jesus found David. And David came to faith. And it was Easter Sunday.

And then this last year, he graduated and was baptized. We just had a Zoom call with them. They're living in New York now. And they're attending Redeemer Church in downtown New York.

And last Sunday, they said, we went to church. And then afterwards, they made an announcement, if anyone would like healing prayer, you know, just come upstairs.

[30 : 41] And they both looked at each other. And they said, you know, we need some healing. And they went up and were welcomed by this church, you know. And God continues the work that he began.

And so when you say yes to small hospitality, you don't know what God is going to do. And to be part of that story is amazing.

Verse 10, we'll wrap it up with this. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. One of our fellow campus ministers, he said, I love this job.

And I do. Because really what we do is we go onto campus. Listen, God has brought all these people from around the world. And our calling is to find our lost brothers and sisters and welcome them home.

Isn't that beautiful? God's at work. And in the great future, you know, imagine someone coming up to you at the great feast, the forever feast.

[31 : 46] And saying, you know, I am here at this feast in part because you invited me to a little feast. You know, I'm here at the great banquet of the Lamb because I had pizza.

You know, or curry or something, noodles at your house. Quick summary. First, things to think about that Jesus teaches.

God is at work. Right? He's deeply at work. It's not up to us. Secondly, keep your eyes open. Keep your eyes open for people.

Keep your eyes open with hope. And thirdly, it's not that hospitality is magical or powerful. Jesus' presence is powerful.

But Jesus loves to surprise people around tables and whack them with grace. Right?

[32 : 46] It's his preferred way, I think, to break down walls and to rescue people as a guest. From the little I know about Christchurch and what we've experienced, you all have thought deeply about this.

And you practice hospitality very, very graciously and well. And just want to encourage you to abound in it. And we're delighted to partner with you in this place as God welcomes people from around the world.

And all of this is clearly revealed at the table before us here. When the crowds mutter and they say, he has gone to be a guest of sinners, a Christian says, oh, thank goodness.

Right? Thank goodness. That means there's hope for me. A few days after this, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. This is kind of the end of his pilgrimage.

Right after this, he goes up for his death and crucifixion and trial and all that. And he climbs a different kind of tree. Jesus is up there.

[34 : 03] And they, the crowds, cried, you know, come down. Right? Come down. And they mocked him. You fraud. You can't even save yourself.

And Jesus, out of love for you and for me, he stayed. Right? He stayed. He stayed till the end.

And he fell to the ground. And he was buried in a garden. And the third day, God's Spirit raised him from the dead. And Jesus is now the true Israel tree.

Right? Absolutely fruitful and filling the whole earth. And inviting you to come and me to come and rest in his branches and be fruitful and multiply.

And Jesus comes to you and he says, I must, you are mine. I must stay at your house today. I'm honored. I'm honored. Lord. I must stay at your house today. And this is deeply, deeply hopeful.

[35 : 11] Really, really, really, really good news. Would you please pray with me? Lord, we're so grateful that you stop and don't just walk by us.

That you see us in all our mess with eyes of hope. And in the middle of that, you call us by our true name. And you name us as part of your family.

And you welcome us home. Lord, I'm grateful for Christ's church. And I pray that hospitality might continue to abound here.

And you would pour out your blessings on this congregation this week and in the days to come.

We're grateful in Christ's name.

Amen. Amen.