

Proper 26C
Luke 19:1-10
November 2, 2025

Living Generously
The Rev. Dr. Brandon Perrine

[Jesus] entered Jericho and was passing through it. ²A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. ⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. ⁵When 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." ⁶So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. ⁷All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." ⁸Zacchaeus 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." ⁹Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

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A highly successful businessman was once asked to make a substantial donation toward an urgent charity appeal. The businessman listened to the case presented then said, "I can understand why you approached me. Yes, I do have a lot of money, and yours is an important cause. But are you aware that I have a lot of calls upon my money? Did you know my mother needs 24-hour nursing care?" "No we didn't," came the reply. "Did you know my sister is struggling to raise a family of eight on her own?" "No we didn't," came the reply. "Did you know I have one son in a drug rehab clinic and another doing voluntary work overseas?" "No we didn't," came

the reply. “Well, if I don’t give them a cent, what makes you think I’ll give it to you?!”¹

It’s all too easy to assume that Zacchaeus was exactly this kind of highly successful businessman. Our text tells us that he was a chief tax collector and he was rich. As we noted last week, tax collectors in Roman occupied Israel were not thought of very highly. They were seen as traitors to their own people, colluders with the hated Romans, and cheats who overcharged in order to line their own pockets. That appears to be exactly how his contemporaries viewed Zacchaeus. But might they have been wrong? Well that depends on how you read the text.

Traditionally, we’ve heard this story as one of *radical conversion*. The corrupt tax collector meets Jesus, repents, and promises, “Half my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone, I will pay back four times as much.” But Greek verb tenses are flexible. The text can just as faithfully be read this way: “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, it is my habit to give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, my habit is to pay back four times as much.”²

In other words—this might not be a story of *repentance* but a story of *recognition*. Jesus sees and restores a generous man who has been excluded because of his profession. Imagine that! Zacchaeus, already generous, already striving to do what is right—now finally seen, named, and welcomed as “a son of Abraham.” Zacchaeus didn’t first experience salvation and *then* become generous. He was generous already—and in that generous way of living, he discovered salvation, wholeness, abundant life.

As is so often the case, there is deep and abiding wisdom in ancient scripture for us today as we begin this year’s stewardship campaign and

¹ “Why Would I Give It to You?” Storiesforpreaching.com:
<https://storiesforpreaching.com.au/category/sermonillustrations/generosity/>.

² Commentary by Joel B. Green from “The New Interpreter’s Study Bible,” 2003.

as we continue to live into this season of generosity marked by special gifts to the Interfaith Food Pantry, kids at Greenman School, and the unhoused folks living at Hesed House.

Modern research confirms what scripture has long known: generosity blesses the giver as much as the recipient. Studies show that generosity lowers stress, strengthens relationships, deepens satisfaction, improves mental health, and even extends life expectancy.³

But let's be honest—times are tough. Inflation is high. Grocery and utility bills have climbed. The government shutdown looms large, hurting those already vulnerable. It's times like these when generosity matters most.

It's tempting to point fingers at the wealthy—as the crowd did at Zacchaeus—and assume that *their* generosity is what the world most needs. But this story turns that question back to *us*. Will *we* live generously? Will we be grateful for what we have and open-handed in sharing it? And whose life will be just a little bit better because we did?

May we discover, like Zacchaeus, that generosity is not a transaction but a transformation. May we find that when we give—of our money, our time, our compassion, our attention—we also receive the gift of wholeness. And may our generosity bear witness to the abundant life we proclaim, here and now and for all.

May it be so. Amen.

³ Amanda Chan. "Seven Science-Backed Reasons Generosity is Good for Your Health," Generosityresearch.nd.edu, December 1, 2013: <https://generosityresearch.nd.edu/news/seven-science-backed-reasons-why-generosity-is-good-for-your-health/>.