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## *Who Is Coming To Your House Today?*

**A Sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler**

**Atlanta, Georgia**

**Luke 19.1-10, The Story of Zachaeus**

Who is coming to your house tonight? Some of us are expecting goblins and ghosts! Some of us are expecting friends and family. Some of us might welcome friends who turn out to be goblins! Yes, tonight might be a strange night. You might have someone visit who has never been to your house before.

Take a moment to consider. Who generally comes to your house each week? Except for tonight, goblins and ghosts do not usually stop by. Take a moment. Does the mail carrier come to your house? Does the FedEx or UPS deliverer come to your house? Do you have friends who usually drop by? Does the workman come to your house? Does the painter? Who are you waiting for?

There was once a man in the Bible named Zachaeus, and I don't think anyone ever came to his house. In fact, he did not have many friends. We might say that he was visited, instead, by the goblin of loneliness. He had chosen a line of work which did not gather many friends. Instead of friends, he had lots of money that came to his house.

Zachaeus seems to have figured it out early on. To be rich, you have to be where the money is. In those days, if you weren't born into it, you learned how to be next to it. You managed it, for instance.

So Zachaeus became a tax-collector. It was a good profession. One got to skim some of the proceeds off the top. We tend to think nowadays that is not a good thing for tax collectors to do!

But it sure seems to be the behavior of every other profession, doesn't it? Investment bankers take their share of the transaction, don't they? Real estate brokers take your share, don't you? Doctors and lawyers take your share.

We all take our share. Most of us know we have to make money to live. What is wrong with tax collectors taking their share, too?

What happens wrong is that we become possessed by another sort of goblin: the goblin of greed. Zachaeus was taken not just by the goblin of loneliness, but also by the goblin of greed.

That is why we tend to spite the tax collectors. They become the symbol of our conflicted feelings about money. We don't want to seem greedy, but we sure want to receive just a little bit more of what we have.

So it was with Zachaeus. He was an out and out tax collector, and he was despised.

One day, Zachaeus heard that Jesus was coming to town. Zachaeus wanted to see what the fuss was about. He was short. He climbed up a sycamore tree in order to see the parade.

"He climbed a sycamore tree." I like that image.

We are all climbing some sort of sycamore tree, aren't we, to see better what we are looking for? What, you say, we are not climbing a tree? Well, we are certainly climbing something. We don't call it a sycamore tree, do we?

No, we call it the corporate ladder. We are busy climbing the corporate ladder, looking, aren't we? We are looking for something. We are visited by still another goblin, the goblin of upward mobility.

It's not just corporate ladders we are climbing. We put ourselves in ivory towers looking for something. We put ourselves at the top of beautiful skyscrapers looking for something.

Maybe we are like Zachaeus, climbing our ladders in order to make up for our shortcomings.

But you know what? Jesus sees us up there! Jesus sees us up in the ivory tower, in the corporate skyscraper, in the cathedral pulpit (yes, even in the cathedral pulpit) trying to find something, but also -also-- trying to hide from something.

Maybe we are trying to hide from being short. Maybe we are trying to hide from not being able to measure up. Maybe we are trying to flee a fourth goblin, the goblin of inferiority. That goblin convinces us that we just cannot measure up.

And, maybe, just maybe that goblin forces us to hide from all the other people.

But Jesus sees us trying to hide.

Yes, Jesus saw Zachaeus first. Jesus called out, "Zachaeus you come down, for I'm coming to your house today."

It would not be the mail carrier or the delivery truck or the lottery check. It would be Jesus himself.

Suddenly, Zachaeus knew what he had really been looking for every day. Every day, something inside him was longing. He couldn't tell what it was. He thought it might be friends. And he thought it might be money.

He had plenty of money. But somehow, that wasn't enough. He still found himself waiting for something, looking for something, every day.

"Zachaeus, come down from that tree. For I am coming to your house today."

And Zachaeus knew. It was Jesus he was looking for. It was salvation he was looking for.

What is salvation?

Salvation means being well. It means waking up in the morning and knowing that the day will be okay today. The ghosts and goblins have been converted and transformed. Salvation means resting assured that God is in the world, and that the world will end up okay. Blessed Assurance.

Salvation is like the fine oil which runs down the beard of Aaron when brothers and sisters get along. Salvation is family and strangers alike eating together, friends and enemies being reconciled. Salvation is something this parish experiences at every All Saints Day Homeless requiem.

We know that not all the world is saved yet, but the world is on the way to being saved. The world is on the way to being saved, if we are willing to do something about it.

Suddenly, Zachaeus knew all this. Zachaeus knew all this in an instant, the instant in which Jesus looked up and called to him.

And so Zachaeus cried out in response, "Have mercy on me, Lord. If I have defrauded anyone, I will pay them back four times as much. If I have hurt someone, I will say I am sorry. I will give away half of what I have."

Zachaeus was converted. Zachaeus was converted to Jesus! He knew that everything he had ever been looking for was in this man Jesus. The goblins were driven out, goblins of loneliness, greed, upward mobility, and inferiority. Instead, comfort and healing and friendship and even great wealth was his -not necessarily the great wealth of mammon and money-- but the great wealth of grace.

Zachaeus knew grace and mercy in Jesus. He was seared by those eyes of Jesus, so much so that he, Zachaeus, wanted to act the same way. Zachaeus wanted to have mercy. Zachaeus wanted to show people grace.

Who is coming to your house today? Will it be people bringing you things that you think will make you happy? Material things that turn out to be ghosts and goblins, maybe?

No, it is Jesus who wants to come to your house today. Come down from that tree, that ladder, that tower. Stop collecting more than you need.

Salvation wants to come to your house today.

And so, the gospel-writer Luke ends this famous passage of scripture with a question he has been asking throughout his gospel: Can rich folks enter the kingdom of heaven? "Look" said all who saw Zachaeus up in the tree. "Look, Jesus has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner."

Can rich folks enter the kingdom of heaven? Jesus replied, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

AMEN.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler  
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip