

4 NOVEMBER

BIBLE READINGS: LUKE 19: 1-10; 2 THESSALONIANS 1: 1-12 ISAIAH 1:10-18; PSALM 32:1-8

SERMON A

How surprised Zacchaeus must have been when Jesus looked up to the tree where he was perched, addressed him by name, and said ‘I must stay at your house today.’ Surely he was the last person Jesus would want to have fellowship with! He was not only a collaborator with the hated Romans, but as a chief tax collector he may also have been using his position to fleece his fellow-countrymen for personal profit (and even if he was not, this would have been assumed to be the case by his neighbours). He was the last person we would expect a holy man to want to associate with!

But from Jesus’ point of view he ‘must’ eat with Zacchaeus. There is a divine necessity here, related to his mission, which is to ‘seek and to save what was lost’. He has ‘not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance’. And indeed Zacchaeus does experience salvation and repentance – proved by his readiness to give restitution to any who have been defrauded, and by his generosity to the poor.

The coming of Jesus in power and glory at the last day will also be a surprise to many. From the world’s point of view, the small group of Jesus’ disciples, we among them, is pathetic. We have no power or status, and indeed always seem to be suffering in one way or another. If a king were to come to our city with all his glory, we would be the last people he would be keen to meet. But the apostle Paul assures Christians in the Greek city of Thessalonica and us Christians today that we are the ones – rather than the powerful politicians, the wealthy business people or the proud philosophers – whom this true King is coming to visit. We are the ones who have recognised him as Lord when others mocked him. Now the tables are turned, and it is the persecutors who are excluded while the Church of Jesus receives a right royal welcome into his eternal kingdom. What ‘songs of deliverance’

we will sing on that day! ‘You’re our island hideaway, you keep danger from the shore, you throw garlands of hosannas around our necks. We celebrate you, Lord, we sing together of your saving power, we raise the roof for you, Lord!’

SERMON B

Jesus often surprised people and acted in ways they didn't expect.

In Jericho, he ate with Zacchaeus, a hated tax collector, collaborator, and traitor, and declared him to be a true follower of God because of his readiness to give to the poor, these generous acts that celebrated Jesus coming to his house.

Jesus also often did things that were special or wonderful – we could say he showed his 'glory' – his birth, his visiting the Temple, aged 12, his arrival in Jerusalem for the Passover, his appearing in the upper room after his death. He spoke and acted with power and authority that came from his identity as God among us.

And Jesus will surprise many people and will do something so wonderful and extra-special, that it will show a glory that is surprising – he will come again – a fact that we're celebrating today! Yes, what joy and wonder we friends and followers of Jesus' will share when he returns, appearing out of heaven in a blaze of fire with his mighty angels, being exalted by his followers, being celebrated by all who believe – and we will be among them.

Finally, because Jesus is so surprising and so extra-special, let us all find different ways in our daily lives to share and enjoy our surprising and special Jesus.