

Calling Zacchaeus to be Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)

Jesus is present in the circumstances in which we already find ourselves.

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I was in my backyard with two of my closest friends, our babies gamboling around at our feet. Their chubby legs topped with puffy blue swimmy diapers made them look like human cupcakes toddling in and out of the splash pool. And maybe it was those cherubic legs or those bald, kissable heads, but something had me wondering about heaven. After all, it was a perfect day, and I was so happy.

Do you believe in heaven? I asked, impulsively (a sin I have). *I mean, do you think of it as an actual place? A place we will actually go some day, or is it possible that we are already in it?*

Oh yes, they said confidently. *We believe in heaven as a real place we will go to after we die,* and then they looked away.

What? I said.

Nothing, they said.

I think it is better not to talk about religion, one of them said.

Why? I said

Because . . . you won't be there, they said.

Hunh? I said

Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your savior? they asked.

Don't feel too bad, said one. *My brother isn't going either.*

Neither is my dad, said the other. *It just makes me so sad. He's a biologist.*

I lay awake that night. Now, I love these two friends (I still do) and I know that they love me. But this was ridiculous. Was it conceivable that these two lovely, intelligent friends of mine really believed what they said they believed? And if they truly believed what they said they believed, why was I the one who was awake and they were fast asleep? Shouldn't they be banging my door down?

That was the day I realized I believed something *else*, something I needed to see more clearly. It was my Zacchaeus moment. Zacchaeus, who climbs a tree to get a better view because he is short and wants to see this Jesus guy better.

I can imagine Zacchaeus, hunched up there, above the crowd, looking around. Bird sounds come into focus. An ant maybe crawls down his shirt, and he brushes it away. People point up at him, gossiping. *What's he doing here, the creep!*

There is fear in the air. Things are heating up. The weather's been weird. There are rumors that the apocalypse is coming. The end of the world seems to be right around the corner. But for the moment Zacchaeus is oblivious, above it all, leaning his head against a tree trunk.

Who am I? he asks himself. *What the heck am I here for?*

Rowan Williams, in his essay "Ray of Darkness," talks about call. Our call from God is really about identity. Instead of focusing on whether or not we have heard God talking to us, telling us what to do, we should focus on listening for and courageously being who we already are.

Who am I? thinks Zacchaeus, listening to the wind, looking for Jesus over the heads in the crowd, then forgetting to look for Jesus over the heads of the crowd, losing his grip on what he knows for sure and who he thinks he is and who everybody else thinks he is. (A sinner, a traitor, a sympathizer, and a tax collector for the Romans, no less. The worst.)

Zacchaeus ... Zacchaeus! It's a voice from right at the foot of the tree. *Zacchaeus, come down right away. I need you.* Jesus is at the foot of the tree Zacchaeus is already in. Jesus is present in the circumstances in which we already find ourselves. Even when we are stuck up a tree like a fish without a bicycle.

"To be ... is to be *where* you are," writes Williams, "*who* you are and *what* you are—a person with a certain genetic composition, a certain social status, a certain set of capabilities. To talk of God as your creator means to recognize at each moment that it is His desire for you to be, and to be the person you are."

Zacchaeus! Come down right away. I need you.

Zacchaeus hears his name and confesses his sins wholeheartedly. His desire to make amends is like a cup running over with joy, not in order to be saved, not in order to get into heaven, but because, as C. S. Lewis says, that first faint gleam of heaven is already inside him, like the light falling on bald-headed toddlers, clamboring in and out of a celestial wading pool.