

TJW, HT, 1.3.09, 9.15am & 11am
our values, part 1: everyone transformed by Christ
(Luke 19.1-10)

This week a friend of mine who'd never been to my house before tried to get here from Enderby, using his SatNav. He was 40 minutes late because he got lost.

He ended up on Burbage Common Road. We can invent all the fancy technology that we want - but you can't remove from human beings our fantastic ability to get ourselves lost.

Now Jesus once said these words: "I came to seek and to save what was lost." We just heard them read from the Bible.

(Turn to them - Luke 19 - and see verse 10.)

He said these words as his great verdict on what had happened when he encountered a man called Zacchaeus, and changed his life.

Zacchaeus didn't look lost. In many ways his life was as good as he could have wanted. We read here that he was a very wealthy man. (If they'd had SatNav back then, he'd have had a top-of-the-range system in his top-of-the-range car.)

But as soon as he encountered Jesus, Zacchaeus knew that he was lost morally - and lost in his relationship with God.

And the story of Zacchaeus is here in the Bible as a model story.

Jesus' comment at the end - "I have come to seek and to save what was lost" - says to us:

- the way Jesus behaves towards Zacchaeus here is a model of how he wants to relate to each one of us.

- the way Jesus transforms Zacchaeus' life is a model of how he wants to transform the life of every single person.

And it says to us: the way Zacchaeus responds to Jesus is a model of how every single person needs to encounter Jesus Christ, and respond to him.

Now I warm to Zacchaeus - because we're told here that he was a short man. Put him in a crowd, and he couldn't see a thing. I know that feeling. When I was a little kid, and football grounds still had terraces for standing, my Dad made a little stool for me to stand on, which we took with us to the football, so I could see.

(If grounds weren't all-seater, and still had terraces, I might still need that stool).

But there's a better reason for preaching on Jesus' meeting with Zacchaeus today - apart from the fact that he's the best-known little bloke in the Bible. What Jesus does to Zacchaeus - the way he approaches him, the way he transforms him - is a perfect, dramatic example of the first of our five values, that we're launching today, and which we're preaching on over the next five Sundays.

You were given a copy of these on your way in - and I'm asking you to get this out right now - and, for the moment, just to look at front cover.

If you're a regular, this is an important leaflet for you to take home today.

There are five of these values. And you'll see on the front cover, it says that these values lay down what matters to us as a church family - what we stand for - what we're here for.

And if you flick through on the inside you'll see that these values are all about people, and all about Jesus:

Here number one, for this morning: everyone transformed by Christ.

And then, in the weeks to come:

- everyone growing in Christ
- everyone praying through Christ
- everyone serving Christ
- everyone witnessing to Christ.

These values were developed over three "Root Church" meetings, to which everyone was invited, last autumn - and they were finalised by the Church Council in January.

Why are we adopting them? Well, it's through setting out these values - sticking to them - testing everything we do by them - that we'll re-envision ourselves here at 9.15am & 11am, as the new 4 o'clock service starts life, as it does today.

You see, one of the main obvious differences that 4 o'clock will make to the rest of us is that there will be some more empty spaces - especially at 11am.

We started 4 o'clock mainly because 11am was getting full. I want us to have the same problem again in 2 or 3 years' time - don't you want the same - that we'll have filled back up again with new

people who are being transformed by Jesus Christ - so that we have to plant again, or start an extra service, or build a balcony - something, in order to keep growing, because more people are encountering Jesus Christ and being transformed by him.

And these values, based as they are in the Bible, will keep us on track, with that goal in view.

In many ways they state what we already know - what we're already about.

But they're now in front of us, in black-and-white, to keep us on track.

So back to Jesus, and to Zacchaeus, who was lost - to and their meeting, which beautifully portrays this first value - everyone transformed by Christ.

There are two stages to this model transformation. And the order is crucial. First, Zacchaeus gets **a transformed relationship with God**. And it's a relationship in which **Jesus takes the initiative**.

Here's the scene: Jesus is on the road. He's on the way to Jerusalem, where he knows he'll be killed. And he's passing through this town called Jericho.

Zacchaeus is curious to see him. But he can't see above the crowd, so he runs ahead, and climbs a tree to get a good view.

And then, in verse 5, something extraordinary happens [READ].

The Messiah, the Son of God, comes straight up to this man, calls him by name, and establishes a relationship with him right there and then.

Of course, Jesus staying in someone's house was a big deal. In his culture, that demonstrated approval of them. It showed that you wanted to associate with them.

We're told that Zacchaeus was a chief tax-collector.

That made him about as popular as that banker who recently led his bank into financial crisis and then retired on a pension of half a million a year.

In Jesus' day the taxes had to be paid to the Roman empire, who everyone hated. And they sub-contracted the tax-collecting to some dodgy local businessmen, who got fat by charging extra taxes and creaming off the profits for themselves.

Zacchaeus was the man in Jericho who everyone loved to hate.

But it's him that Jesus singles out.

And here's the next shock. You can imagine the crowd thinking, as Jesus' went over to Zacchaeus' tree to talk to him: "That's right, Jesus, tell him to sort his life out. Tell him to stop ripping us off."

But Jesus doesn't, does he. He goes up to this man who's lost in greed and selfishness, and says... what?

"Give up your greed"? "Try and be a bit nicer to people Zacchaeus, please"?

No. He says: "Zacchaeus - today, I must come into your home, and into your life." He doesn't start with moral instruction. He starts with a transformed relationship.

That is the way God always starts his work of transforming us.

He says: "I know what your life is like. I know your secret sins, as well as your public ones. I know your fears. I know how lost you feel. I know how lost you are. But you can have a new relationship with me, right now, starting exactly where you are right now."

The Bible has a few other words to describe this.

Here are just a few:

First, grace. Grace means: God loves us enough to die for us, even while we were still sinners, still rejecting him.

There's justification. Justification means acquittal. It means: God has decided to set my relationship straight with him, even before I've got my life sorted out the way he wants.

There's the phrase "born again", in the Bible. It means: God has made me spiritually alive to him, even when in so much of my life I'm lost and can't sort myself out.

And there's the phrase "new creation". Anyone who is in Christ has been re-created - in a whole new forgiven, restored relationship with our creator-God.

All of these are different ways of describing how we see Jesus taking the initiative to establish a new relationship with Zacchaeus, even while he's still lost in sin.

For committed Christians, we must never forget that the solid ground of our Christian lives is Jesus transforming my relationship with God, even when I was lost in sin.

If we ever forget that, we'll think that our relationship with God is driven by us doing good things for him.

And if we think that, then we'll end up stupidly smug, because we think we've done enough good things. Or we'll be lost in self-doubt, because we're not sure we've ever done enough.

Either way, our Christian lives fall apart.

If you're not yet a committed Christian here this morning - here's the question for you.

Are you curious about Jesus, just as Zacchaeus was?

Is today the day you realise that Jesus wants to come over to the tree you're hiding in, and say to you: "No need to fear. I know you - I know you by name. I know who you are and what's going on in your life. And I must stay at your house today."

He will take you as you are - and then if you'll welcome him, as you are, you'll have a new relationship with him, and then he'll begin to transform you, bit by bit.

That's the first stage. Jesus takes the initiative with us, exactly as we are, wanting to establish a new relationship with us.

And then comes the second stage:

A transformed life, in which **we respond**.

This is the big moment in Zacchaeus' life - and there are two things he gets exactly right. The first is when Jesus says to him: "I must stay at your house today." See how he responds, in verse 6 [READ].

He doesn't curl up and die with embarrassment.

He doesn't say, "That would be nice - but do you know what kind of greedy, deceitful man I am?". He just says: "yes please."

He accepts Jesus taking the initiative with him.

That's the hardest thing in the world to do, if we're try to hold onto our pride, our dignity, and our self-sufficiency.

But it's the easiest thing in the world to do, when you know, like Zacchaeus, that you need what Jesus wants to give you.

The word 'faith' isn't used here - but if you want to know what faith in Jesus is, just look at Zacchaeus.

But it doesn't stop there. The second big things Zacchaeus gets right is the way he responds, probably once he's had Jesus in his house for a while - verse 8 [READ].

If you want to know what repentance means, this is it, in verse 8.

He starts by accepting Jesus taking the initiative - and then he responds, with a transformed life.

Now we need to be careful, because sometimes people tie themselves in knots here. They look at Zacchaeus and say, "I don't think I could give away half my possessions - so I can't really be a Christian."

But we need to see that the issue with a transformed life is not how far up the scale you are, but the direction you're travelling in. Are you heading up the scale of a transformed life - or is the needle just not flickering at all?

Often there's radical transformation that the Christian barely notices, because it feels so natural.

Are you now delighted to give away money and possessions for Christian work that before you'd have spent on your family and on yourself?

When you cut someone down with a sharp remark, do you now want to apologise straight away, when before you'd have said they probably deserved it?

Do you know want everyone you know to come to Christ, when before you didn't care what they believed?

This week two different people in the church family made offers to the Winter family to provide housing for them. One offer would have cost the person quite a bit of upheaval themselves. It happens that neither works out practically - but the point is that the offers were freely made.

Andy told a friend who's not a Christian about it. The friend asked: "Where do you find people who make offers like that?!"

Well, that's just the transformation into sacrificial generosity that Jesus brings, isn't it.

Zacchaeus gives away so much because he'd lived in such greed.

The question is: what's the direction of transformation in your life?

See what Jesus says in verse 9 [READ]. Take these two stages of transformation together, and you've got 'salvation' - you've got what it means to 'belong to God':

Christ takes the initiative, just giving us a transformed relationship with God, right where we are.

And then we respond - we welcome him into our lives, and we see the transformation in life that he brings starting to happen.

It must work that way round. It's like marriage. First you establish the relationship - you seal the deal - even if you're nervous and not quite sure what it will all bring. And then you start to live the life.

This is our first value. It's what we're about as a church family:

To be on the look-out for any Zacchaeuses, who are up their trees just watching Jesus, encouraging them to come down and welcome him in - so that in three years' time we're full again.

And to keep on being Zacchaeuses ourselves - people who know we have a transformed relationship with God, just because he graciously gave it to us - and who joyfully live transformed lives as a result.