

REFLECTION

Seven weeks ago, our Gospel reading was from Luke, Chapter 15, in which Jesus told three parables: “The Lost Sheep,” “The Lost Coin,” and “The Lost Son.” In telling those parables, Jesus told the people: “I tell you, in just the same way there will be rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” (Luke 15:10). In the Gospel reading for this Sunday, Jesus shows His joy over the repentance of one sinner, Zacchaeus, and says, “Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a descendant of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost.”

If we were to look at what is going on in our world, or in our own individual lives, would we see that there are some things that are indeed, “lost?” It seems to me that one thing that is lost in our world in many places is a sense of connection. In the United States, for example, we have a hunger for more and more energy, as technology becomes more and more complex. And in our hunger, we are tempted to forget our connection to all of God’s creation, and we get lost in a desire to consume all we can, and use up the resources that are available to us. In so many parts of the world, we have lost a sense of connection to each other. As we struggle to live in pluralistic societies, we have turned to conflict and division, often to the point of violence. One can visit almost any continent on earth, and see how groups of people look on other groups of people with disdain, and even hatred. “Ethnic cleansing” and genocide, not to mention prejudice and discrimination, are still very much with us in the 21st century.

But if we look at our first reading from Wisdom, we see God’s sense of connection with *all* of His creation. The author of Wisdom writes, “For you love all things that are and loathe nothing that you have made; for what you hated, you would not have fashioned.” Are we able to “love all things that are?” Are we able to forego loathing what or who is different from us, simply because they *are* different from us? Are we willing to re-establish our connection with all that is? Are we willing, like Zacchaeus, to repent?

Luke tells us that Zacchaeus is a tax collector and a wealthy man. He also wants to see who Jesus is. He is also short of stature, which prevents him from seeing Jesus because of the crowd. At this point, his physical stature is an obstacle to his encounter with Jesus. One wonders whether there had been spiritual obstacles as well. Perhaps his “stature” in the community, as a wealthy man and as a despised tax collector, prevented him from seeking God before this.

Whatever the case may be, Zacchaeus climbs a sycamore tree, so that he can see Jesus. It turns out that Jesus sees Zacchaeus, and invites Himself to Zacchaeus’ house. In this encounter, Zacchaeus’ life changes. He is unconcerned with the people who look down upon him as a “sinner.” He proclaims in public: “Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over.” Zacchaeus is connected once more to God and to his best self. Just as the sycamore tree physically lifted Zacchaeus up, so Jesus’ love has spiritually lifted him up!

What kind of world would we have if we all were lifted up by the love of God in Jesus Christ? Could we find ourselves rededicated to eradicating poverty in the world? Could we see ourselves intimately connected with all of creation, and act accordingly? How would it be if we, as individuals and as nations, acted as Zacchaeus did, and made at least some kind of restitution to each other for the injustices of the past?

May we be open to the transforming love of Jesus Christ! May what has been “lost” be restored to us and to the world! And, in the words of St. Paul, from our second reading, may God make us “worthy of his calling and powerfully bring to fulfillment every good purpose and every effort of faith, that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in [us], and [us] in him, in accord with the grace of our God and Lord Jesus Christ.”

In Christ,

Phil, CP