

Transforming Welcome

When we feel lost, we may experience a loneliness of spirit that leads us to cry, “Where are you, O God?” Even as our hearts long to seek after God, God searches for us. God welcomes us through the friendship of Jesus the Christ, finding those who are lost, welcoming those who are considered outcasts, and lifting up those who are weary.

Focus Scripture: Luke 19:1–10

While passing through the city of Jericho, Jesus encounters Zacchaeus, a man of great riches and small stature, a man held in disdain. As the chief tax collector, Zacchaeus was a franchise owner who prepaid the allotted Roman tax and then hired collectors to recoup his costs plus a profit. Because he worked for the Romans at the expense of his own people, he was perceived as morally corrupt and ritually unclean.

Zacchaeus makes a great effort to see Jesus, even embarrassing himself by running and climbing a tree like a child. Surprisingly, it is Jesus who calls out Zacchaeus’s name and breaches social etiquette by inviting himself to this stranger’s house: “I must stay at your house today” (v. 5). “Must” is the Greek verb *dei*, which expresses divine necessity.

In the Mediterranean world, it is considered an honour to be the host. In Lebanon today, a host greets a guest by saying *tsharrafna*, “you honour us.” Jesus *must* honour Zacchaeus by being his guest. In turn, Zacchaeus welcomes Jesus and experiences joy. He cooperates with the divine “must” or will by making restitution, symbolizing his repentance. In ancient Israel, fraudulently taken money or property was returned fourfold, a practice derived from the law regarding stolen sheep (Exodus 22:1). In Luke’s community, it was important to bear fruits of repentance, as John the Baptizer had preached (Luke 3).

Recent scholars have debated the meaning of what Zacchaeus says in verse 8. Is it “I will give” (as in the New Revised Standard Version) or “I give” (as in the Revised Standard Version)? “I will give” implies a transformation as a result of meeting Jesus. “I give” implies a protest that Zacchaeus has been unfairly maligned. Zacchaeus states “if I have

defrauded anyone...” (v. 8), which protects his image. Furthermore, the name Zacchaeus – a common name of the time – means “pure and righteous,” which adds to the rich meaning of the story.

Encountering Jesus is transformational for Zacchaeus: “Today salvation has come to this house because he too is a son of Abraham” (v. 9). Not only does Jesus affirm Zacchaeus’s biological descent, he also affirms his spiritual identity. Zacchaeus was seeking Jesus, and Jesus was seeking Zacchaeus: “The Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost” (v. 10).

Finally, Luke uses the word *today* to proclaim that God is doing a great thing right now. Giving hope to those who feel lost and lonely, God’s grace is at work today.

God never ceases to welcome us and offer new beginnings. In **Habakkuk 1:1–4, 2:1–4**, the prophet feels frustration with injustice, destruction, and violence; the prophet also hopes for God’s wisdom. The spirit is not right in the proud, but the righteous abide in their faith. **Psalm 119:137–144** seems to empathize with Zacchaeus, celebrating that God’s ways are delightful and lead to truth and life. The words of **2 Thessalonians 1:1–4, 11–12** give thanks for those who are growing in faith, as God continually makes them worthy as disciples.

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Today, God is doing great things through all kinds of people, working to expand the community of faith. When we welcome Jesus, who welcomes us, surprising and wonderful things happen. What does it mean to welcome the Spirit of God, so that you may be the channel of God’s good news? What acts of welcome might help restore and transform your community?



October 31, 2010

Focus Scripture
Luke 19:1–10

Additional Scriptures
Habakkuk 1:1–4; 2:1–4
Psalm 119:137–144
2 Thessalonians 1:1–4,
11–12

Seasons of the Spirit is based on **semi-continuous readings** of the *Revised Common Lectionary*.

For materials for **Reformation Day**, go to www.spiritseasons.com, click on the Library tab.

O God, you surprise us with love that seeks and embraces. Your graceful welcome is so affirming that it is life-changing. Help us embrace your welcoming Spirit with gratitude and joy, so that we too may live with such love. Amen.

If you have Internet access, visit www.spiritseasons.com to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

The Focus for Ages 5–12

Many children know the story of Zacchaeus, perhaps from the old song about Zacchaeus that they may have learned without hearing the story. The full story and the information about tax collectors can bring freshness to it for all the ages from 5 to 12.

However, don't get hung up on the size of Zacchaeus. That Zacchaeus was short has long been given as the reason for telling this story to children. It is not. The story of Zacchaeus is

one of transforming welcome as the title for this session suggests. Such a welcome is for children too. And this warm welcome is one they can give to others. Look for ways, such as greeters, for the children in your group to practice welcoming others in safe settings. Help them think about how they welcome one another to the group, and how they welcome children who are new.

Pray that the children in your group will always feel welcomed in the church.

October 31, 2010



Materials needed

Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Luke 19:1–10, and biblical background material (p. 67). When has someone taken special notice of you, or when have you taken special notice of someone else?
- ❑ Bring *basic supply kit* (see p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Music CD, vol. 8* and *CD player*. *Seasons .mp3 Downloads* are available for purchase from www.spiritseasons.com.
- ❑ Bring songs "Let the People of God," "Stand, O Stand Firm," and "May Peace Be with You/Salumun Kullahee" (p. 2, 12, and 11 in *Music Section*; also on #27, #18, and #24 on *Seasons Music CD*).

Gather

- ❑ Prepare worship table with *green cloth* for the Season after Pentecost, *Christ candle*, *matches*, *offering basket*, and *Bible*. Place *bookmark* at the beginning of Luke. Display *poster "Open Window"* so children can see it when seated.

Engage

- ❑ Prepare to tell story on *today's resource sheet "A Surprise Visitor."*
- ❑ For interviews group, bring object to use as microphone (wooden spoon, cardboard tube with foil ball on top, whatever you can find).
- ❑ For research group, bring *copies of today's resource sheet "Tax Collectors 101"* and *directions*.

Respond

- ❑ **Art zone:** *large paperclips, lightweight yarn, small googly eyes, and small safety pins*
- ❑ **Music zone:** *song "Go, Make a Difference" (pp. 3–5, Music Section; also #28 on Seasons Music CD)*
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** *copies of today's resource sheet "Surprising Invitation"*
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** *poster "Open Window" and directions*
- ❑ **Cooperation zone:** *60 cm/ 24 in dowel, felt or mural paper, yarn, variety of papers, and posters for this season*

Transforming Welcome



Scripture

Luke 19:1–10

FOCUS To explore how being with Jesus reveals God's love.

GATHER

Welcome the children and introduce guests or new children to the others. Play the song "Let the People of God" (p. 2, *Music Section*; also #27 on *Seasons Music CD*) as the signal to gather at the worship table.

Opening ritual

Call to learning Light the Christ candle. Remind the group that its flame is a reminder of Jesus Christ's presence with us. Invite the children to gaze at the poster *Open Window* and repeat each line of the call to learning after you:

This is the Season after Pentecost.
During this season,
we will learn from prophets
and disciples,
from the psalm writer
and apostle Paul.
The Bible will be like a window
open to God's ways
and wisdom.

Song Play the song "Let the People of God" (p. 2, *Music Section*; also #27 on *Seasons Music CD*). Encourage the children to sing with you. During the song, receive the offering.

Pray this prayer, or one of your own:

Holy God, we gather here to learn about you and how to follow Jesus. May our hearts and minds be open to your teachings. Amen.

Extinguish the candle as a sign that the opening ritual is over.

Connecting with the focus

Feeling welcome Take this opportunity to do a little sleuthing for your congregational leaders. Ask:

- What makes you feel welcome at church?
- What makes you not feel welcome at church?

If this bears no fruit, ask:

- How do you help people feel welcome at home or at church?

Later, share any information, with the children's permission and without betraying the children's confidences, with the appropriate committees or leader. Tell the group that the story for this session is about someone who was welcomed by Jesus.

ENGAGE

Preparing for the story

Luke's stories about Jesus Have a child get the Bible from the worship table and open it to the bookmark. Since this is the third story from Luke, the child can probably tell you the name of the book. Have a child turn to Luke 18. Review the stories there about the widow and the judge and the Pharisee and the tax collector. Point out that they were stories that Jesus told to teach the people. The story for this session is at the beginning of chapter 19 and is a story about something Jesus did.

The Bible story

A surprise visit Tell the story on today's resource

sheet "A Surprise Visitor," based on Luke 19:1–10. Ask:

- Why do you think Zacchaeus was surprised that Jesus would come to visit?

Exploring the story further

To enable the children to explore the story further, according to interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.

Interviews group Recalling the story as though they were there will help the children retain it in their memories. Review the story together. Who was there? What happened? Then have them pretend that they were Zacchaeus or someone in

the crowd. More than one person can be Zacchaeus. With your microphone, ask questions for them to answer, such as:

- **We heard that Zacchaeus wasn't liked. What do you think of Jesus going to his house?**
- **Why do you think Jesus went to the house of Zacchaeus?**
- **Zacchaeus, did you have any idea that Jesus would want to come to your house?**
- **Zacchaeus, we heard that some people didn't like the idea of Jesus going to your house. How do you feel about that?**

Conclude with this question for everyone:

- **What did Jesus teach us about God by going to the house of Zacchaeus?**

Research group This group will learn more about tax collectors in Jesus' day. Provide copies of today's resource sheet "Tax Collectors 101," writing paper, pencils, and these directions:

- 1 Take a copy of "Tax Collectors 101."
- 2 Read it silently or take turns reading it aloud.
- 3 You can imagine that most of the people did not like tax collectors.
- 4 Draw a picture of the crowd when Jesus left to go home with Zacchaeus. Consider that not everyone may have felt the same way about this.
- 5 Give your picture a title.



The Bible story and us

Play the song "Stand, O Stand Firm" (p. 12, *Music Section*; also #18 on *Seasons Music CD*) as the signal to come together. Invite the background research group to show their pictures. Ask:

- **What did Jesus teach us about God by going to the house of Zacchaeus?**

3

RESPOND

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

- **Art zone: Paperclip pals** Zacchaeus found a new friend in Jesus, a friend who revealed God's love to him. Make paperclip pals as reminders of this friendship. Have enough supplies for the children to make one to keep, one for a friend, and one to save at the church for a newcomer or visitor. Cut 12 pieces of yarn about 15 cm/6 in long. Fold them in half and loop them through one end of a paperclip. Pull apart the strands and fluff for hair. Glue googly eyes to the paperclip. See illustration. Slide a safety pin through the loop of the paperclip.
- **Music zone: Song of change** When Jesus stopped to speak to Zacchaeus, it brought about change. Sing this song of change "Go Make a Difference" (pp. 3-5, *Music Section*; also #28 on *Seasons Music CD*) to remind that they can work for change too. This song was introduced on October 10,



so some children may remember it. Talk together about how their outreach projects can make a difference. Enjoy singing the song.

- **Outreach zone: Welcoming others** Children have many opportunities to welcome others. Provide copies of today's resource sheet "Surprising Invitation" and pencils for the children to find the "fallen" message. When everyone has the message, ask:



■ What might people feel lost?

You may want to give an example, such as someone who is lonely, to help the children move beyond being physically lost. Then read and discuss "Something to talk about" on the resource sheet.

Ask if the children can be greeters some Sunday morning. They can rehearse how to greet people in this zone.

- ❑ **Quiet zone: Art meditation** Having a new vantage point can help us see God’s love more clearly. Display the poster *Open Window* or set up this zone at the worship table. Provide these directions and quarter sheets of paper and crayons:



- 1 Sit and look at the poster for a moment. Look at the space outside the window and how far you can see.
- 2 Imagine that Jesus is walking down the road, coming toward your house.
- 3 What do you want to ask Jesus about welcoming people, even people you don’t like very much?
- 4 What do you think Jesus will say?
- 5 What else would you like to ask Jesus?



- ❑ **Cooperation zone: Welcome banner** Make a welcome banner for the learning space as a sign of the warm greetings you want to convey. Begin with a piece of sturdy paper or felt just smaller than the dowel. Suggest that the children look at the *Seasons* posters for ideas for the banner and things to draw on it. Have one child print “Welcome” in large letters on the paper or cut them from felt to glue to a felt banner. The other children can draw designs they like from the posters or cut fancy papers into interesting shapes. Display the completed banner in the learning space or just outside the entrance.



Gather Play “Stand, O Stand Firm” (p. 12, *Music Section*; also #18 on *Seasons Music CD*) as the signal to gather at the worship table. Light the Christ candle. Say:

The light of the candle reminds us that Jesus the Christ sent the Holy Spirit to be with us.

Play the song “May Peace Be with You” (p. 11, *Music Section*; also #24 on *Seasons Music CD*). Invite the children to sing the parts they recognize.

Pray this prayer, or one of your own:

Welcoming God, may we follow Jesus’ example when he welcomed Zacchaeus and showed your love to the world. Amen.

Blessing To each child say, “(Child’s name), welcome others in Jesus’ name.”



As you observe the children working in the Respond zones, how are they welcoming to one another? This concludes the stories from Luke. What do you think the children will remember about them?

This Season after Pentecost and the church year are drawing to a close. Are there projects that the children will want to finish before Advent?



A SURPRISE VISITOR

based on Luke 19:1–10

Use body language and gestures to suggest how much the people disliked tax collectors.

The people in Jericho were excited. It was all over the marketplace.

“The teacher is coming.”

“The one called Jesus is near the city.”

“I hear that he healed a blind man outside the city.”

“Let’s go see him.”

A crowd soon gathered along the road. In the crowd was a tax collector named Zacchaeus. No one smiled at him because they didn’t like tax collectors. The tax collectors worked for the Roman government, which had taken over their land. Some tax collectors cheated the people and kept a lot of money for themselves. These tax collectors had big houses, fancy clothes, and things the other people didn’t have.

Zacchaeus could hear the people whispering about him as he tried to get to the road so he could see. But no one would give him room. So Zacchaeus ran ahead to a tall sycamore tree. He climbed into its spreading branches.

He sat on a branch where he could see the road clearly.

When the people saw Zacchaeus in a tree, they must have laughed at him. A fancy tax collector in a tree like a little boy?

When Jesus came to the tree, he looked up and saw Zacchaeus. “Zacchaeus,” said Jesus, “hurry down here. I am coming to your house today to visit you.”

The people stared at Jesus. Then they stared at Zacchaeus. “Jesus, going to the house of a tax collector, a cheater!” “Why would Jesus go to the house of someone who works with the Romans?”

Zacchaeus scrambled down from the tree and stood in front of Jesus. “Teacher, I give half of what I earn to the poor. If I have made a mistake and cheated someone, I pay them back four times what I owe them.”

The people couldn’t believe what they were hearing. But Jesus believed and said to Zacchaeus, loud enough for the people to hear, “Zacchaeus, you are part of the family of God. God’s love will come to your house today.”

Then Zacchaeus and Jesus left to have a joyful meal together.



Tax Collectors 101

INFORMATION ABOUT TAX COLLECTORS

All you've ever wanted to know about tax collectors but were afraid to ask

Tax collectors in Jesus' day were usually organized into companies who bid for the right to collect taxes for the hated Roman authorities. They would pay the allotted Roman tax on behalf of the Jewish people and then collect the money back from the people. They were allowed to charge extra in order to make a living, and some collectors abused the system. Zacchaeus as a chief collector was probably the owner of one of these companies.

traitor

How did the people view tax collectors?

Most people viewed the despised Roman authorities as the enemy. Obviously the tax collectors cooperated and collaborated with these authorities, therefore tax collectors must be traitors. Also, as the Romans were not Jewish, they were considered to be ritually unclean. Anyone who shared a meal with them, or went into their houses, would be considered contaminated and therefore unclean. As tax collectors had regular contact with the Romans they were automatically branded as unclean "sinners" because of this contamination.

cheat

sinner

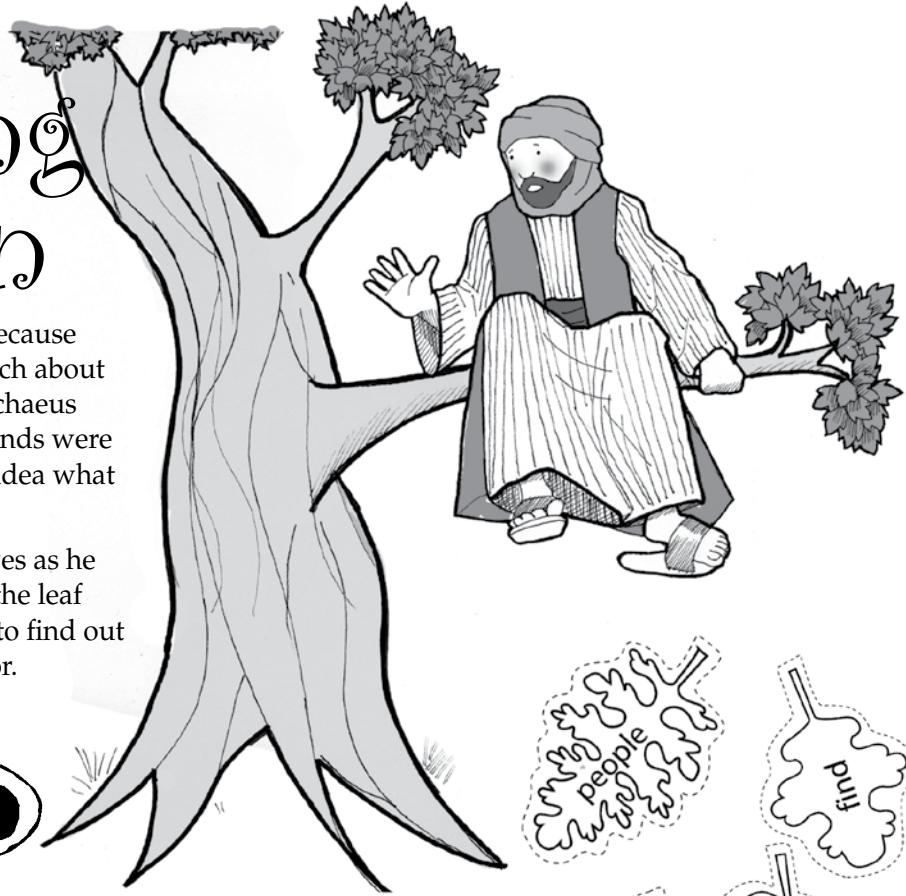
thief



Surprising Invitation

Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus, because the tax collector had heard so much about this amazing teacher. Maybe Zacchaeus had heard that some of Jesus' friends were tax collectors. Zacchaeus had no idea what Jesus was going to say to him.

Zacchaeus knocked off some leaves as he was climbing up the tree. Match the leaf shapes at the bottom of the page to find out what Jesus said to the tax collector.



Something to talk about



Jesus helped the people of Jericho to see Zacchaeus in a new way. How?

Just like Jesus we can offer the hand of friendship and help one another feel welcomed and accepted.

How might you help someone feel welcomed

- ..at school?
- ..at church?
- ..at your house?

