

Rev. Dr. Yugo Suzuki's Sermon

10./31/10 **Zacchaeus, Hurry Down** **Luke 19: 1-10**

Zacchaeus was a tax collector. He was ruthless in collecting taxes from the poverty stricken people for the oppressive government of King Herod.

Wealth bought him many things he wanted: good food, a spacious house, and many other comforts.

And yet, Zacchaeus was not a happy man. His wealth could not buy him self-respect and the sense of fulfillment.

It was this sense of uneasiness that made him want to meet Jesus. But a crowd was surrounding him. So Zacchaeus climbed a sycamore tree and from there he could see Jesus.

Seeing him in the tree, Jesus called out to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry down." For the first time in his life, in Jesus Zacchaeus met a person who accepted him as a friend.

This encounter radically transformd Zacchaeus. He promised to Jesus, "Half of my possessions, I will give to the poor." Jesus declared, "Today salvation has come to this house." Forgiveness does miracles. This is true even today.

Some time ago, I watched on TV a documentary film on the life of a convicted criminal who had murdered a young woman.

He shows no remorse whatsoever. He is sullen and full of disdain and contempt throughout the entire trial.

Two years later, he is visited in prison by the father of the woman he murdered. The film zeroes in on their meeting.

The father explains to the criminal why he has come to see him. For two years, he was consumed with hatred and rage. He could not sleep. He could not work. He did not know how to get out of this living hell. He started to wonder, "Will I live like this for the rest of my life?"

The father tells the convict that he came to the realization that the only way to overcome the hatred and rage that were eating him away was to forgive the man who had murdered his daughter. "That's why I am here," says the father. "I am here to tell you that I have forgiven you."

At these words, the criminal's entire body shakes; he covers his face with his hands and starts to cry. The disdain and contempt which characterized his entire adult life thus far suddenly disappear.

As Christians, we can say that Jesus is gently sustaining the father of the murdered woman. Also, Jesus is embracing the hardened criminal and accepts him as a precious child of God. Indeed, "Salvation has come to this house."

The story of Zacchaeus rings true today. Like him, we often cover ourselves with sharp needles of self-interest and egocentrism.

But the same love that freed that father and that criminal for reconciliation liberates us to a new birth, a new life, a new meaning.

So like Zacchaeus, let us hurry down to meet Jesus face to face. He is waiting for us with his arms wide open.

Thanks be to God. Amen.