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 2nd Sunday of Lent

Mosaic: God Uses our Regrets
Luke 19:1-10

*He entered Jericho and was passing through it.² A man was there named **Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich.**³ He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was **short** in stature.⁴ So he ran ahead and **climbed** a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way.⁵ When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, **“Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.”**⁶ So he hurried down and was **happy to welcome him.**⁷ All who saw it began to **grumble** and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a **sinner.**”⁸ Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, **“Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.”**⁹ Then Jesus said to him, **“Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham.”**¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek out and to **save the lost.**”*

Most of us know *Zacchaeus by the song—*
Zacchaeus was a wee little man, and a wee little man was he.
 We often think this is just the story of a short guy
 who climbed a tree to see Jesus in the crowd.

But Luke tells us that Zacchaeus was a *chief tax collector.*
 And he doesn't stop there—Luke also says *‘he was RICH’.*
 If we had lived back then, that's all that needs to be said.

Tax collectors were working with the Roman government,
 Who were occupying and oppressing the Jewish people.
So, tax collectors were traitors.
 And a *chief* tax collector?
 Well, he would be the *most hated, most despised* of all people in town.
 Because not only was he collecting unfair taxes,
 but he was the one who would take over when debts were not paid—
 and take you for all you've got.

Shane Stanford, Mosaic: When God Uses All the Pieces, Abingdon: Nashville, 2011, pg. 28-31.

And his riches? *That would have been considered blood money.*
 Because he was getting rich from people barely getting by!
 He was taking food out of kid's mouths,
 and clothes off people's backs.
 And keeping plenty of it for himself!

The fact that we can *sing a cute little song* about him is pretty *ironic*,
Or maybe not.

Many of the *best nursery rhymes are actually pretty dark.*
 Three Blind Mice –about a vicious, knife-wielding farmer's wife?
 And there's---Rock a bye baby ends with this:
 then down will come baby, cradle and all.

The cute Zacchaeus song *SANITIZES this scandalous story*
 about an evil guy coming to see Jesus,
 and *Jesus going to his house!*

It's no wonder the *crowd grumbles* about Jesus eating with him!
Jesus looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today."

⁶*So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him.*

⁷*All who saw it began to grumble and said,*

"He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner."

In reality, this guy is more than a sinner,
 he's a thief, colluding with the oppressors.

So what does this story have to do with *US, today?*
 Well, this week we continue to study Shane Stanford's book,
Mosaic: When God Uses All the Pieces,
 and this week's focus is on *God using our REGRETS.*

The story of Zacchaeus is a *perfect illustration,*
 Because he *must have been a man full of regrets.*
 And yet, when he encounters Jesus,
 There is a *transformation* of his life,
 and Jesus uses all of it for good.

We don't know why he would have gone to see Jesus in the first place—
 maybe just curiosity, *or maybe it was a sense of guilt or REGRET.*

I wonder, how can WE identify with Zacchaeus?

Can you? I know I can.

But we ALL have regrets, don't we?

Some are *big events*—bad things we said or did.

Or, *small things* that we failed to do,

Or ways we didn't speak up.

I know that my first marriage, and that divorce

Was such a hurt for my kids

That it is my *life's biggest regret*,

even the parts beyond my control.

It's one of those life-changing events that *ripples*

Year after year, hurt after hurt.

What regrets come to YOUR mind?

How have *you dealt* with them?

And have you taken it to Jesus?

This story is all about GRACE and forgiveness.

Jesus *doesn't say I forgive you*—but he does say that *SALVATION* has come to Zacchaeus when he pledges his transformation.

When have YOU received God's grace?

Sometimes the hardest person to give grace to—is you.

Sometimes the hardest person to *forgive---is yourself, right?*

Has that ever been true for you?

There are people who live their WHOLE lives

trying to *make up* for one horrible mistake.

Like a person who tried drugs—just once—but that was the beginning of the end.

Or someone who was unfaithful—and that unravels a relationship.

One of the most heart-wrenching movies I've ever seen

came out about a year ago starring Morgan Freeman.

It's called *A Good Person*, and it's all about a young woman whose actions cause a deadly car accident...

and the guilt causes her life to spiral out of control.

The story is all about the *repercussions of her actions while driving*.

What regrets do YOU have?

And have you ***tried bringing*** them to Jesus?

Have you considered ***laying them down, at the foot of the cross?***

And ***leaving*** them there?

When Jesus sees this tax collector, he says:

“Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I MUST stay at your house today.”

And you know what Zacchaeus did?

After the shock wore off,

He happily welcomed Jesus to his house!

And then, Zacchaeus stood and said,

“Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor,

and if I have defrauded anyone of anything,

I will pay back four times as much.”

Talk about a ***TRANSFORMATION!***

This ***tax collector*** is now going to give ***half of his riches*** to the poor!

And to all the people he’s defrauded—and ***you know he’s defrauded people***—
he’s going to pay back ***four times as much*** as he owes them!

This is almost unbelievable!

Jesus sees this transformation and ***CELEBRATES*** by saying:

“Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”

Woo—talk about SCANDALOUS!

Jesus is saying that ***Zacchaeus is not only transformed,***

But he is a ***beloved child of God***, AKA a son of Abraham,

and he has received salvation!

The Greek word here for salvation, is *soteria*, comes from the word Savior, and it means salvation or ***deliverance from one’s enemies.***

Which is pretty interesting, for a guy who could probably count most of the town as his enemies!

And Jesus says this man who was lost, has now been found.

His regrets--- have been turned into joy!

His bad choices---have become the path to new life!

The whole story begs the question—*how can WE BE LIKE Zacchaeus?*

Which means we have to start thinking about---

How can we *look* for Jesus?

How can we *get closer to Him?*

How can we *meet the eyes* of our Savior?

And once we meet his gaze, how can we *bring our regrets to Him?*

This story causes us to ask:

*Can we surrender even our worst sins, failures, and mistakes,
and LEAVE THEM with Jesus?*

Can we allow God to forgive us,

And can we *forgive ourselves?*

There's this incredible verses in Romans 8:1 that says
there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

None. No condemnation.

Think about the grace and love in that statement.

You know, sometimes our regrets are *not just our own, personally.*

Sometimes regret is *larger, systemic, communal*—a whole community, or country.

June 1st will be the 103rd anniversary *of the Tulsa Race Massacre.*
Which is where came from.

But even growing up in Oklahoma I never heard about it in school.

And it was a massacre of innocent people.

In the black area of Tulsa known as Greenwood,

in the downtown known across the country as *Black Wall Street.*

It was a place of opportunity and successful businesses, all black-owned.

Early in the morning on June 1, 1921 a white mob descended upon Greenwood.

And they destroyed over *1400 black--owned homes and businesses*—including a hospital, a library, schools, and over two dozen churches.

They *wiped out 35 square blocks* of Tulsa.

In just 18 hours *over 300 black people* were killed,

and over *10,000 were left homeless.*

The mob came with guns, torches, and planes that dropped bombs from the sky.

(April 2021 Smithsonian magazine, “The Truth About Tulsa”)

Why is this story IMPORTANT today?

It's important because ***racism***— still happens -- individually and communally.

And you know what?

The people who carried out that Tulsa crime,
not only killed innocent people and put them in unmarked graves,
but they made sure that photos and news were ***wiped out*** of the history of Tulsa,
and the country, for many years.

Thank God for those uncovered the truth,

And who are working today in Tulsa's Greenwood district to grow and support
black businesses, and search for the graves to honor the victims.

Sadly, Tulsa's race massacre was ***NOT a singular event***.

Such events happened all over the country.

We would do well to ***remember, honor, and seek to understand these events***,
so that history does not repeat itself.

Especially as we celebrate Black History this month.

Maybe we weren't there—but some of our ancestors were,

And for that there is the regret of a whole country.

This is why people speak of reparations---a small act, to help make amends.

Did you know that each time our Presbytery meets

we acknowledge the original Native American landowners,
whose land we took and enjoy today?

Bringing things like this into our ***collective consciousness is powerful***,

Because it helps us move forward, and not repeat the past.

The bottom line is this---it is ***HEALING to bring our regrets***,
whether individual or communal,

To Jesus.

It's ***healing to bring our failures to God***.

Because God is the only one who can use those regrets,
transform them, and put them into the mosaic.

We cannot heal what we do not acknowledge.

We cannot ***REPENT*** of what we do not ***ADMIT***.

Racism is just one thing we are called to acknowledge, admit,
And dismantle.

In the Greenwood Rising Historical Center in Tulsa,
is a quote by James Baldwin, that says:

***“Not everything that is faced can be changed,
but nothing can be changed until it is FACED.”***

I’ve heard people say that talking about racism,
Or the oppression of minority groups is *too political*.
Sadly---many in our society *have MADE these issues political*.

But for Christians, they are NOT.

For us, it is about *justice and love*—love of God, and love of neighbor.
The simple, yet revolutionary *Great Commandment* of our Savior Jesus Christ.

For me, *confronting and dismantling racism and prejudice* of all kinds,
is personal.

I come from a large family, of all kinds of people--*black, white, gay, straight,*
transgender, Native American---just to name a FEW of our differences.

We’re like a patchwork quilt, just like this country, just like our world.
So talking about communal regret, hits close to home.

Maybe YOU have been the target of other people’s sins?

Maybe YOU have suffered from the failures of those around you?

Regardless, we ALL are human, so we ALL have regrets.

We have things we wish we didn’t do—yesterday,
or things we wish we didn’t do—just this morning!

We all make mistakes,
we all fail miserably from time to time.

And we have regrets as a community, and even as a church.

There are big failures in every organization or group.

But if we are willing to ***ACKNOWLEDGE our mistakes,***

Then we can ***bring those regrets to Jesus.***

We can ***repent*** of those things that we are willing to admit.

We ALL have things we wish we hadn't said, or done.
Things we wish we could take back, or do all over again.

And here's the great news-- when we bring those regrets to Jesus,
God uses them to make a mosaic of our lives.
The broken and jagged pieces of ***regret, are worked into a masterpiece.***
God ***transforms*** our regrets into new life,
by the power of Jesus' ***LOVE AND GRACE.***

Salvation can come to OUR house,
just as it did for Zacchaeus.
That is our ***Good News of the Gospel*** today.
And for that Good News, all God's people can say together, Amen.