

Today we are going to begin by looking at the assumptions that people make about us. What assumptions do people make about you and why? You were each given a slip of paper when you entered today. I invite you to write down your answers to this question on the paper. After you write your answer I am going to invite you to turn in your paper and I am going to read what people have written. You don't need to write your name down unless you want to.

The question is: "What assumption do people make about you?" It could be based on what you look like. Where you are from. How old you are. Your family name. What is an assumption that people make about you?

If you have a child with you I invite you to talk with your child and help to write out any answer that your child may have about assumptions that people may make about your child.

I am also going to allow time for anyone to speak out loud any assumptions that people may have about you.

During the children's message I read the story about Zacchaeus from my children's Bible. I am not going to read it again but there is one verse I am going to read from two different versions because there is a key difference in these two translations.

We may have heard about the character of Zacchaeus from the song that we sang earlier in worship. The story as it is usually told is about a rich man who was greedy and selfish and people did not like him because he is so greedy and selfish. He is a short man so he climbs up a sycamore tree to see Jesus because he is too short to look over the crowd.

We normally read the story as Jesus noticing the man named Zacchaeus up in the tree. Jesus speaks to him and invites himself to his house where they share a meal together. Zacchaeus then stands convicted for his past wrongs and decides to repay his debt to society.

That is the way the story is usually translated. But not all of the versions of the Bible translate it this way. I want to invite us into verse 19:8 and read the two ways that this story is interpreted that makes a huge impact on how we understand this story. The first version is the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. This is the way we ordinarily read this passage and pay attention to verb tense:

Luke 19:8 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

⁂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."

So Zacchaeus is confronted by Jesus and he makes a promise to Jesus that he will change his life and will no longer be greedy but will return money to the poor. Some Bible translations, however, interpret this verse very differently. Let us now read the Revised Standard Version of the Bible:

Luke 19:8 Revised Standard Version (RSV)

⁂And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold."

What did you notice here about verb tense? So a different way to read this passage is that Zacchaeus is someone who has always given half of his money to the poor before he encounters Jesus. In this translation Zacchaeus tries to make sure that he is honest in his dealings. In this translation, the people around Zacchaeus assume that because he is a tax collector he is corrupt and greedy. But in this second reading Zacchaeus is a misunderstood character with false assumptions about him.

The name Zacchaeus means “righteous one.” The gospel writer Luke records his story after several stories that include rich people. Earlier in the gospel Luke quotes Jesus as saying, “woe to the rich.” Luke records Jesus as condemning the man who wanted to build bigger and bigger barns to store all of his wealth.

Luke records the story of poor Lazarus in heaven while the rich man burns in the torment of hell. And Luke records the story of the rich young ruler who becomes sad when Jesus instructs him to give away his wealth to serve others.

So when we get to the story of Zacchaeus we would expect a similar condemnation of this rich man. But that is not what happens. We discover that this may be a story where assumptions are made about this man because he is a tax collector. Assumptions are made about him by the people who don’t know anything about his core values.

When we get to the end of the story do we see what the people do? This part was left out of the children’s version that I read from.

Read Luke 19:5-7

So Jesus invites himself to the home of Zacchaeus for a meal of hospitality and the people are furious. The people are furious because they don’t want their assumptions about Zacchaeus to be challenged. They want Zacchaeus to be the bad guy that they can use as an object of their scorn. They don’t want Jesus to hang out with people that they assume to be terrible people. But Jesus sees what is on the heart and ignores the assumptions that are made about people.

So now let’s go back to the assumptions that people have about us. The assumptions that people have about you may be way off base. That’s not who you really are. Maybe, like Zacchaeus, you have been misunderstood. Maybe there is someone close to you in your life that has been misunderstood. Maybe you have made assumptions about others based on something about that person.

So maybe we need to take some action like Zacchaeus did. Maybe we need to separate ourselves from the crowd and look at Jesus from a different vantage point. Zacchaeus needed to climb a tree. Zacchaeus was willing to climb that tree and after he did that Jesus said, "Zacchaeus I am coming to your house today." Maybe we need to open ourselves up to the way that Jesus sees us and how Jesus sees others that we make assumptions about.

We are in the midst of our stewardship season when we are being invited to reflect on how we are sharing our gifts to God. I invite you to reflect on the story of Zacchaeus as the story of someone who was very generous but misunderstood. But even though others misunderstood him Jesus did not. Jesus knew exactly who he was and how he carried out his stewardship.

So I invite us to not make a big deal about what we give or what we do. It's OK to quietly go about your business and share your self, share your time, and share your financial resources to serve God. We are not generous with those things to get the admiration of others. We are generous with our time, talents, and financial resources to be faithful to God. God sees how generous we are. God knows.

So I invite you to see yourself as God's sees you and to be generous in giving back to God. AMEN.

+++++

-Text: Luke 19:1-10

-Given: October 30, 2016 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)