

## Sermon for 28<sup>th</sup> June 2020

**Text: Luke 18:35-19:10 - The Two Men of Jericho**

May I speak in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

35 As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging.  
36 When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. 37 They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.”

38 He called out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

39 Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

40 Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, 41 “What do you want me to do for you?”

“Lord, I want to see,” he replied.

42 Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has healed you.” 43 Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.

**19:1** Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. 3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” 6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.”

8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

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

I am David, Bishop of Basingstoke. I have been a Church minister for over 30 years, working in that time in two dioceses – Sheffield and Winchester. As a Christian I think I have been forged in South Yorkshire and formed in

Hampshire, in the gracious company of many fellow travellers. Together we have prayed, wept and laughed and sought to follow Jesus in our workplaces, our communities and our households. Generous June is a collaboration between Sheffield and Winchester dioceses.

## **Jericho**

I love the city of Jericho! I first visited Jericho when Helen and I led a band of pilgrims from Sheffield 25 years ago. We spent the first part of the week visiting Nazareth, Capernaum and the Sea of Galilee. We read the accounts of Jesus ministry to each other – there were 50 of us and I think all would still say they encountered Jesus in a new way. The journey along the Jordan Valley, and the retelling of the events of Holy Week were poignant and personal – but it's the end of Luke 18 and the beginning of Luke 19 that had us pausing for a few hours in Jericho.

It starts just outside the gates, on the way in: As they drew close to Jericho a blind man, Bartimaeus, was desperate. He calls out to Jesus and then starts shouting – The Son of Timaeus shouts

“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me”. Some started to get embarrassed and told him to shut up – but the volume just got louder. Jesus suddenly stopped –and after a short conversation asks Bartimaeus

“What can I do for you?”

“I want to see” he replied. The destitute beggar is healed, his circumstances dramatically changed, the unemployed man, now able to work.

A few moments later there is another man desperate to see Jesus. In contrast Zacchaeus is possibly the wealthiest man in the city. He has seized the opportunities collaboration has given him. Working with the occupying Roman authorities, he is a tax collector. In those days the tax collectors had targets of money to collect, with many opportunities to collect significantly more than their target. As Zacchaeus got wealthier, it became clear he was not only a collaborator but was also exploiting the men and women of Jericho. He was hated. Unable to glimpse Jesus, Zacchaeus climbs a tree to see him. Just as

Jesus stopped in front of the Son of Timaeus, so now he stops in front of Zacchaeus.

The crowd is scandalised as Jesus looks up at Zacchaeus and says

“I am coming to your house”.

We don't know the content of the conversation, but there is a dramatic transformation. Instead of the drive to acquire Zacchaeus seems determined to give most of his wealth away. “Half to the poor and anyone I have defrauded – can I pay you back fourfold...”

I do sometimes get irritated with Luke! I want to know what happens next. Do Bartimaeus and Zacchaeus become friends? Does Jericho get changed by these two men?

I voiced my frustration in a Confirmation class recently! A 13 year old lad spoke up “Bishop – its obvious!” - “The story gets finished in our lives!”

The story gets finished in our lives!

We too can easily get gripped by the drive to acquire more! We are bombarded with the need for the latest equipment, the best car, the largest house. The reason so often is our own security. We look at what we have and can say how successful we are, how we have provided for our future.

It is important to steward our finances and our gifts, to ensure we look after the wealth we have been given. But life is not about accumulation of that wealth. In the end we can't take it with us. Life is instead about serving God, about seeking first the kingdom so that when Jesus asks us to give an account of our lives we will be ready for him.

When I take a funeral relatives and friends talk about their relationship with the person who has died. Of all our relationships our relationship with God is the most important. It is with God we are promised an eternal security. It is Jesus himself who says “seek first the Kingdom of God”. In our quieter, more reflective moments, what do we find ourselves thinking about? It can be sign of what we are seeking above all else.

Using the Generous June materials, you have the chance to spend time reading Luke’s Gospel and allowing the person, teaching, and actions of Jesus to catch your imagination afresh. Listen to the daily podcasts as well as the Sunday sermons – the voices of young and old, of men and women from Hampshire and South Yorkshire – allow Jesus to shape you, your faith and your commitment to the community of those who follow Jesus.

Generosity can be so deep that it is profoundly pervasive in all of our lives, so that money is only a part of generosity – how we share our time, our space, our gifts, our friendship is all part of a transforming generosity.

Can I urge you to be open to Jesus call to you today? In the early days of the new Christian community they began to gather, teaching and encouraging, worshipping and praising, baptising and proclaiming God’s grace. Many joined that new gathering of Jesus-followers every day and we are told, almost as a throw-away remark “nobody in that region was in need” – these people shared their lives, their food, their time and their prayers. I hope through this passage and over the last few days you have become compelled afresh at the vision of authentic generosity. When our giving of money comes from that basis the Church will find its needs are met.

The next step is deeply personal – ask the Lord to give you a fresh vision of his generosity for you. Would you in the light of that be prepared to prayerfully review your own financial giving. I have huge respect for those who quietly give wherever they are prompted to give.

Can we join together in offering a tangible generous commitment to the local church and support it in its serving of our communities?

Where do we start?

Could I ask you to consider giving a significant one-off gift to your own local church? And secondly, as part of a commitment to generosity, would you review your regular giving to the Church, and consider increasing your giving, or if you don't give regularly to the Church, consider starting?

It is imperative at this time that we are sensitive to individual financial situations, so please, if your financial circumstances have changed significantly in the last weeks and months, it may be that through your prayerful giving review, you rightfully decide to reduce your giving to the church at this time.

In Sheffield and in Winchester it has been the experience of radical generosity that has most significantly shaped my understanding of God's love and of prayers that are answered beyond our imagining!

Amen