
Reflection 1 An invitation for flawed people. Luke 19:1-10 Tall or Short

On Thursday, at a funeral service in Liberton Kirk, Edinburgh, I paid tribute to my friend, John, a fellow CoS minister, brother in Christ, & my best friend – besides my wife & my twin - & my walking companion for the past 31 years. & at John's specific request & that of his wife and 2 adult children, I also gave a message about the reality of God's Grace aimed primarily not for closest family & friends present but for the many watching on live-stream.

Before he was called to train for the ministry, John was a Scottish international athlete who had joined city of Edinburgh Police as a cadet & went on to serve 30 years as he rose up through the ranks to Chief Inspector, but at times was held back by his unswerving integrity. As a young bobby on the beat, he had reported a senior officer for a hut & run offence. In spite of being encouraged *to let it go*, John felt it was important to do the right thing even if it cost him; & throughout his life, John was known for doing the right thing and not hiding. Brought up in the Church of Scotland & the BB, as a young father of 2 and a youth fellowship leader, John became an elder in his local parish church. But John would say it was only then, that he thought more deeply about what he promised & the claims of Christ, committed his life & knew salvation, the healing, redeeming power of God's love through Christ. Through the promptings of the Holy Spirit & the faithful preaching of his local minister, God's grace found out John and has followed & held him ever since. (Ps. 23:6)

John was a tall man who stood straight and tall – there is a silver statuette of a police officer in uniform brought out for all the formal dinners at the Scottish Police College at Tulliallan that was modelled on John. He was approachable & respected by all who knew him

In contrast, Zacchaeus was short & *sleekit* – *a wee cowering timerous beastie* a wee man with a big chip on his shoulder, wanting to see Jesus, not tall enough to see through the crowd, but hiding &, he had thought unseen, up in that sycamore tree. A rich man with a big house, servants & fine clothes but despised, hated, ridiculed & rejected by his fellow countrymen & women for being a tax collector for the Romans, a profiteering, cheating collaborator, & inside so lonely and empty. Yet Jesus noticed him & invited himself into his home & life, & was welcomed gladly. ***All the people muttered and grumbled***, as some people always do, but Zacchaeus was offered God's grace & forgiveness & enabled to change & make a fresh start.

Jesus has gone to be guest of a sinner, they muttered. But in doing so, Jesus then told them, ***salvation has come to this house***. God's grace had sought and found out Zacchaeus, followed & held him ever since.

Jesus ***came to seek and to save what was lost***. Jesus still goes to be ***the guest of sinners*** - imperfect, wounded, frail people, like you and me. Yes, in these restricted conditions here today, our celebration of communion is not ideal or perfect **but it never will be** – Christian POWs on the River Kwai shared grains of rice & murky rice water in obedience to Christ's command to remember what He has done for us on the cross and His promise to hold us by

grace in His body of the Church. Those POWs knew God's blessing, presence and love within them then in their hellish situation. Today, here or at home, whoever we are and whatever we have done, let us then share bread and wine, trusting in God's grace, the constant loving kindness and mercy that still seeks and invites our response.