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

The story of Zacchaeus is a familiar one to some of us, so much so that we are in danger of missing the significance of it. Zacchaeus’ encounter with Jesus is a model of what it means to be someone who learns from the life and example of Jesus.

Remember the story of the rich young ruler a couple of weeks ago? He couldn’t quite bring himself to give his riches away and wandered sadly off. Here, Zacchaeus is a chief tax collector who comes to show great generosity.

This story highlights three important themes in Luke’s gospel:

The first is Luke connecting discipleship with real-life issues.

The second is salvation, which we are given to understand is something that happens in the present, not something that may or may not happen in the future. Only Luke of the synoptic gospel-writers calls Jesus ‘Saviour’, and the heart of the Zacchaeus story is Jesus’ declaration at the end of that passage we heard: salvation has come to the house of Zacchaeus.

And the third theme is repentance and conversion. Luke thinks that being changed, inside and out is the true response to hearing about Jesus, and this is the response modelled by Zacchaeus.

The nature of discipleship is that it is something we do **for** ourselves but not **by** ourselves. The person who seeks Jesus – in this case Zacchaeus, but of course any of us - is himself or herself sought out and found by Jesus. Zacchaeus goes to great lengths to climb the tree and see Jesus, but it is Jesus who looks up into the tree and invites Zacchaeus to share a meal with him.

When we lived in North Cornwall, the boys sometimes went to the one place in Bude that might, at a bit of a stretch of the imagination, be called a Club. For some reason lost in the mists of time, I went to pick them up one night – well, one morning….. Now, because our youngest uses a wheelchair, it’s a big car. I was lurking outside, with the engine running, hoping to get home and into bed quite soon, and watching young people milling round, some of them a bit the worse for wear, when the back, sliding door opened and a young man got in. Not one of mine. He was not easily persuaded that I was not a taxi and had no intention of running him home, but with the help of some amused others, he did eventually leave.

That young man didn’t actually get as far as offering me money, but there is a story that does the rounds in church circles once in a while about a vicar who dropped a friend at the station and had a similar experience – except that the man offered him £5 and the vicar took him where he wanted to go. Only then did he confess that he wasn’t actually a taxi driver – whereupon the man took back his £5 and offered the vicar 50 pence for the collection instead.

I’ve mentioned Red Nose Day once already in recent weeks. We find ourselves moved by great need. But should we not also be moved to generosity by gratitude for all that has been given to us? We give without counting the cost to those we love, but how often do we stop to notice how **we** are held, sustained, but yes, also challenged, by the love and grace of God?

That’s how it was for Zacchaeus. As a senior tax collector for the hated Romans, with a reputation for corruption and profiteering, Zacchaeus was not a popular chap in that area. No wonder, then, that people grumbled when Jesus went off to tea at Zacchaeus’ house. But that simple cup of tea – or whatever it actually was – was a bit like the communion we share on Sundays: a public and prophetic sign of the grace of God.

And the presence of Jesus prompted two things to happen in Zacchaeus: he promised to sort out his financial dealings by paying back those whom he had wronged when he had taken more than was his due. And he pledged to give half of his wealth to the poor. And this is not a calculated generosity; it is the response of a man who is in the grip of grace and for whom financial integrity is now evidence of his changed heart.

In the film Sleepless in Seattle, Sam, the Tom Hanks character, describes meeting his wife: it was like coming home to a place I had never been before. Luke captures, in this story of Zacchaeus, precisely that sense of homecoming, welcome, purpose, belonging, acceptance and love. It was a welcome far beyond anything he might have hoped for and it helped him to reengage with the community of God’s people. Jesus’ extravagant grace brought out of him an act of great generosity in return. It is interesting that the rich ruler called Jesus ‘good teacher’, but Zacchaeus calls him Lord: money was no longer in control of Zacchaeus’ life.

It is no accident that Zacchaeus meets with Jesus over a meal. Such meals were characteristic of Jesus’ ministry; they were important then, but for us too, food is an important part of the welcome we extend to others and of the shared life of our families, including our church family. That is why we have breakfast together every so often – like today.

We might even say that a meal is a kind of parable, a representation, of the Kingdom of God in action. We can give generously of what we have, we can do right with it and we can also share it with others: first by extending hospitality, and a warm welcome with food is one of the ways we do that. A warm and welcoming church with facilities for all ages and types of need is key to that welcome, but it has attendant costs.

Secondly we can share, as Zacchaeus did, by giving to the needs of others and that is what our church seeks to do in our mission-giving outside the walls of this building. The story of Zacchaeus is not about generous giving into a vacuum but about open hands and open hearts to the community and beyond.

For Zacchaeus, and for us, grace invites generous giving. How we think and feel about money, and how we choose to use it, reflect our faithfulness.

Jesus came so that everyone might have life in all its fullness. Becoming part of that fullness involves generous living. It was Winston Churchill who said: We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.

**Amen**