

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
“Am I Zacchaeus, the crowd, or Jesus?”
(Part IV of “Which one am I?”)
January 25, 2025

-Scripture

Luke 19:1-10
Ezekiel 33:11

Core Idea and purpose

Core theological ideas from earlier sermons in the series:

- (01/04/2026) Personal holiness is having a heart full of faith, hope, and unconditional love. Holiness is synonymous with Christlikeness.
- (01/11/2026) God invites all of us to salvation (the wedding banquet) but to participate we must repent and cooperate with the Holy Spirit so God can change our hearts.
- (01/18/2026) God call us to be peacemakers. Are we willing to risk it all, like Abigail, to be a peacemaker?

Core theological idea: When we meet unpopular or marginalized people, will be judgmental gatekeepers, like the crowd in Luke 19:1-10, or inviting neighbors, like Jesus?

Challenge/purpose: To encourage people to be inviting neighbors to the marginalized people of the world.

The Sermon

I would like to tell you the stories of two different men who needed to meet Jesus. One of the stories is about this guy named Ron McCintosh. There's a picture of him on the screen.¹ We find the other story in Luke 19:1-10. It's about a man named Zacchaeus. These two stories are about all of us because everyone needs to know Jesus.

Ron is a friend of mine. I met him in July 2015, when I was the pastor at First UMC of Port St John. He lived in a tent, out in the woods, a few miles from the church. People knew him as the homeless guy who would ride his bike all around Titusville, Port St John and Cocoa. Sadly, he went home to be with the Lord on March 25, 2018.

Ron had a childlike mentality. I suspect he had little intellectual stimulation during his childhood. He grew up in an extremely chaotic and abusive home. His mother was an alcoholic, and she kept trading one alcoholic boyfriend for another

¹ His picture is in Appendix A

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alcoholic boyfriend. Ron never knew what new ‘stepdad’ he might find when he woke up in the morning. Many of these ‘stepdads’ abused him, and his mother would always side with the ‘stepdad’. As you can imagine, this abusive environment taught Ron to be angry and violent.

This angry and violent attitude led to a life of conflict and hatred, especially when it came to his relationship with law enforcement. At some point during his early life, Ron developed a deep fear and hatred for police officers. Some of his many confrontations with the police became violent. Not surprisingly, he spent time in state prison for battery on a police officer.

As a homeless person and ex-offender, Ron was a marginalized member of society. He was an outcast. He, like everyone else, needed to meet Jesus. Throughout his life, Ron heard about Jesus - various people would tell him about Jesus and he passed by many churches. Soon after he got out of prison, Ron began to look for Jesus.

Ron reminds me of the other man who needed to meet Jesus. His name is Zacchaeus. He was a Roman tax collector and, as such, he collaborated with the oppressive Roman government. His fellow Jews probably viewed him as a traitor. To make it even worse, the Bible emphasizes that he was rich. This means that he collected more taxes than what was demanded by the Romans. Like Ron McCintosh, Zacchaeus was a despised outcast. His fellow Jews would have nothing to do with him. Also, like Ron, he needed to meet Jesus and he looked for Jesus.

When Zacchaeus heard that Jesus was passing through Jericho, his hometown, he decided he was not going to miss this opportunity. He was going to do whatever it took to meet Jesus. But there was a big crowd lining both sides of the road upon which Jesus was traveling. I imagine Zacchaeus tried to push his way through the crowd, but the crowd kept pushing him back. No one would let him through. Along with being a despised tax collector, he was also short. There was no way Jesus was going to see him through the crowd. The crowd was acting as judgmental gatekeepers keeping Zacchaeus away from Jesus.

When Ron searched for Jesus, he also met up with a group of people – the congregation at the UM church in Port St. John. When I first arrived at that church, the outgoing associate pastor introduced me to some members of the homeless community, which included Ron McCintosh. I developed a relationship with him, visited him at his camp, and he started to show up at various church events. Ron would often show up at a church event with shaggy clothes, knotty hair, sweaty body, and a strong and nasty body odor. Although he had a friendly, childlike personality, some people felt uncomfortable around him.

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As we already know, in Zacchaeus’ story, the crowd acted as judgmental gatekeepers. They kept Zacchaeus away from Jesus. So, Zacchaeus took matters into his own hands. He climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus and to get his attention. Jesus stopped right below Zacchaeus and said, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately, I must stay at your house today.” In this way, Jesus became the inviting neighbor.

The Lord Jesus promises that if we seek him, we will find him and Zacchaeus found Jesus that day. And Jesus wasn’t content with simply saying hello and walking off. Jesus wanted an intimate, loving relationship with Zacchaeus. So, he said he needed to come into his house and have a meal with him. A good way to get to know and have intimacy with people is to eat a meal with them at their house. So, Zacchaeus was able to meet Jesus, despite the crowd acting as judgmental gatekeepers, because Jesus became the inviting neighbor.

When Ron began to attend church functions, the congregation had to decide, would they be like the crowd in Zacchaeus’s story and become judgmental gatekeepers or would they be like Jesus and become inviting neighbors? They decided to be like Jesus and became an inviting neighbor. Ron would use his limited income to buy all sorts of gadgets and then take great delight in showing them to people at various church events. It was like he was at a ‘show & tell’ in elementary school. He also enjoyed talking about the shower, latrine and other gadgets he built at his camp. The members of the congregation genuinely listened to him as he showed off his gadgets and explained the improvements he made to his camp. Ron felt welcomed at the church events and through the congregation, Ron met Jesus.

Zacchaeus’ encounter with Jesus changed his heart. After welcoming Jesus into his home, Zacchaeus declared, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” To which Jesus replied, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Ron’s encounter with Jesus also changed his heart. He would spend a large part of his day sitting in his tent, reading Scripture and listening to Joyce Myers. He would come by my office about twice a week to share what he learned from Joyce Myers and ask me a whole lot of theological questions.

I knew he was becoming more holy & loving like Jesus. I knew this, not because he read Scripture, listened to Joyce Myer and talked to me about theology, but because his fear and hatred towards the police started to disappear. Before he knew Christ, the sight of a police officer would strike fear into his heart, and he

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would often express this fear with anger. If the officer approached him, he would either run or fight. But, as he got to know Jesus, all this started to change.

Ron died in 2018, but several months before he died, Ron was able to spot a police officer and resist the ‘fight or flight’ urge. Although he was still extremely nervous, he was able to talk with them without getting into trouble. For Ron, this was a big step! He still didn’t like them, but he was learning how to get along with them. I believe that if he had lived another year or two, he would have gotten to the point where he would have respected them and maybe even loved them. This is because the Holy Spirit was changing his heart to make him more holy & loving like Jesus. This is what happens when we meet Jesus and develop a relationship with Jesus.

So, when we read the story about Zacchaeus or consider Ron’s story, we ask ourselves, “At this moment, which one am I like? Am I like Zachaeus or Ron, the despised outcast? Am I like the crowd in Zachaeus’ story, the judgmental gatekeeper? Or, am I like Jesus, the inviting neighbor?” We will have one minute of quiet time. I invite you to prayerfully ask yourself these questions during the one minute of quiet time.

[After a minute of quiet time]

Let’s pray.

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Sermon Outline

- I. I would like to tell you the stories of two different men who needed to meet Jesus.
 - A. One of the stories is about this guy named Ron McCintosh.
 - There’s a picture of him on the screen.²
 - B. We find the other story in Luke 19:1-10.
 - It’s about a man named Zacchaeus.
 - C. These two stories are about all of us because everyone needs to know Jesus.
- II. Ron is a friend of mine. I met him in July 2015, when I was the pastor at First UMC of Port St John.
 - A. He lived in a tent, out in the woods, a few miles from the church.
 - B. People knew him as the homeless guy who would ride his bike all around Titusville, Port St John and Cocoa.
 - C. Sadly, he went home to be with the Lord on March 25, 2018.
 - D. Ron had a childlike mentality.
 - I suspect he had little intellectual stimulation during his childhood.
 - He grew up in an extremely chaotic and abusive home.
 - His mother was an alcoholic, and she kept trading one alcoholic boyfriend for another alcoholic boyfriend.
 - Ron never knew what new ‘stepdad’ he might find when he woke up in the morning.
 - Many of these ‘stepdads’ abused him, and his mother would always side with the ‘stepdad’.
 - As you can imagine, this abusive environment taught Ron to be angry and violent.
 - E. This angry and violent attitude led to a life of conflict and hatred, especially when it came to his relationship with law enforcement.

² His picture is in Appendix A

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- At some point during his early life, Ron developed a deep fear and hatred for police officers.
- Some of his many confrontations with the police became violent.
- Not surprisingly, he spent time in state prison for battery on a police officer.

F. As a homeless person and ex-offender, Ron was a marginalized member of society.

- He was an outcast.
- He, like everyone else, needed to meet Jesus.
- Throughout his life, Ron heard about Jesus - various people would tell him about Jesus and he passed by many churches.
- Soon after he got out of prison, Ron began to look for Jesus.

III. Ron reminds me of the other man who needed to meet Jesus. His name is Zacchaeus.

A. He was a Roman tax collector and, as such, he collaborated with the oppressive Roman government.

- His fellow Jews probably viewed him as a traitor.
- To make it even worse, the Bible emphasizes that he was rich.
 - This means that he collected more taxes than what was demanded by the Romans.
- Like Ron McCintosh, Zacchaeus was a despised outcast.
 - His fellow Jews would have nothing to do with him.
 - Also, like Ron, he needed to meet Jesus and he looked for Jesus.

B. When Zacchaeus heard that Jesus was passing through Jericho, his hometown, he decided he was not going to miss this opportunity.

- He was going to do whatever it took to meet Jesus.

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- But there was a big crowd lining both sides of the road upon which Jesus was traveling.
- I imagine Zacchaeus tried to push his way through the crowd, but the crowd kept pushing him back.
- No one would let him through.
- Along with being a despised tax collector, he was also short.
- There was no way Jesus was going to see him through the crowd.
- The crowd was acting as judgmental gatekeepers keeping Zacchaeus away from Jesus.

IV. When Ron searched for Jesus, he also met up with a group of people.

- A. When I first arrived at the UM church in Port St John, the outgoing associate pastor introduced me to some members of the homeless community, which included Ron McCintosh.
- B. I developed a relationship with him, visited him at his camp, and he started to show up at various church events.
- C. Ron would often show up at a church event with shaggy clothes, knotty hair, sweaty body, and a strong and nasty body odor.
- D. Although he had a friendly, childlike personality, some people felt uncomfortable around him.

V. As we already know, in Zacchaeus’ story, the crowd acted as judgmental gatekeepers.

- A. They kept Zacchaeus away from Jesus.
- B. So, Zacchaeus took matters into his own hands.
 - He climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus and to get his attention.
 - Jesus stopped right below Zacchaeus and said, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately, I must stay at your house today.”
 - In this way, Jesus became the inviting neighbor.
- C. The Lord Jesus promises that if you seek him, you will find him and Zacchaeus found Jesus that day.

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- And Jesus wasn’t content with simply saying hello and walking off. Jesus wanted an intimate, loving relationship with Zacchaeus.
 - So, he said he needed to come into his house and have a meal with him.
 - A good way to get to know and have intimacy with people is to eat a meal with them at their house.
- So, Zacchaeus met Jesus, despite the crowd acting as judgmental gatekeepers because Jesus became the inviting neighbor.

VI. When Ron began to attend church functions, the congregation had to decide, would they be like the crowd in Zacchaeus’s story and become judgmental gatekeepers or would they be like Jesus and become inviting neighbors?

A. They decided to be like Jesus and become an inviting neighbor.

- Ron would use his limited income to buy all sorts of gadgets and then take great delight in showing them to people at various church events.
 - It was like he was at a ‘show & tell’ in elementary school.
 - He also enjoyed talking about the shower, latrine and other gadgets he built at his camp.
- The members of the congregation genuinely listened to him as he showed off his gadgets and explained the improvements he made to his camp.
- Ron felt welcomed at the church events and through the congregation, Ron met Jesus.

B. Zacchaeus’ encounter with Jesus changed his heart.

- After welcoming Jesus into his home, Zacchaeus declared, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.”

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- To which Jesus replied, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

VII. Ron’s encounter with Jesus also changed his heart.

A. He would spend a large part of his day sitting in his tent, reading Scripture and listening to Joyce Myers.

- He would come by my office about twice a week to share what he learned from Joyce Myers and ask me a whole lot of theological questions.

B. I knew he was becoming more holy & loving like Jesus.

C. I knew this, not because he read Scripture, listened to Joyce Myer and talked to me about theology, but because his fear and hatred towards the police started to disappear.

- Before he knew Christ, the sight of a police officer would strike fear into his heart, and he would often express this fear with anger.
- If the officer approached him, he would either run or fight.
- But, as he got to know Jesus, all this started to change.

D. Ron died in 2018, but several months before he died, Ron was able to spot a police officer and resist the ‘fight or flight’ urge.

- Although he was still extremely nervous, he was able to talk with them without getting into trouble.
 - For Ron, this was a big step!
- He still didn’t like them, but he was learning how to get along with them.
- I believe that if he had lived another year or two, he would have gotten to the point where he would have respected them and maybe even loved them.
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- This is what happens when we meet Jesus and develop a relationship with Jesus.

VIII. So, when we read the story about Zaccheaus or consider Ron’s story, we ask ourselves, “At this moment, which one am I like? Am I like Zachaeus or Ron, the despised outcast? Am I like the crowd in Zachaeus’ story, the judgmental gatekeeper? Or, am I like Jesus, the welcoming neighbor?”

A. We will have one minute of quiet time.

B. I invite you to prayerfully ask yourself these questions during the one minute of quiet time.

[After a minute of quiet time]

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