

Sermon – Nailed it!
Sunday, October 30, 2022
Scripture: Habakkuk 1:1-4 and 2:1-4. Luke 19:1-10
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Our first scripture reading is Habakkuk 1:1-4 and 2:1-4. The book of this minor prophet is a series of conversations between Habakkuk, a contemporary of Jeremiah, and God. Habakkuk questions God's motives during the Babylonian invasions. Although his longing to understand the human situation finds no direct answer, Habakkuk is encouraged to hold on to what is right and receives a glimpse of an answer as God contrasts the proud with those who live by faith. Hear now what the spirit is saying.

The oracle that the prophet Habakkuk saw. O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So, the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous—therefore judgment comes forth perverted.... I will stand at my watch post, and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what God will say to me, and what God will answer concerning my complaint.

Then the Lord answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith. Amen.

Our second scripture reading is Luke 19:1-10. As we continue our journey with Jesus through Luke's gospel, we marvel at the skill with which Luke weaves his message into this literary work of art. In chapter 18 we heard the contrasting prayers of the Pharisee and the tax collector and wondered how a religious person could have such contempt for others and how one who is a recipient of that contempt could show such faith and humility? This week's reading is another glimpse into the life of the tax collector and his encounter with the living Christ. Let us open our hearts and minds to the hearing of God's word.

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So, he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." So, he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." 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." Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost." Amen.

The title of the sermon: "Nailed It!"

The text: "So Zacchaeus ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because Jesus was going to pass that way." Luke 19:4

Let us pray. Holy and Loving God, give us each the courage and fortitude to "nail it" when it comes to seeing you more clearly and living our faith more authentically. And now, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

The expression "*nailed it*" means one executed something to perfection and received the expected result; it could not have gone better. The expression can apply to many situations, tasks, and activities. The phrase has nothing to do with the action of "nailing" something, rather it is a metaphor for driving your point home with precision and strength, achieving the result you wanted from the task.

When the "Nailed it!" t-shirt featuring Martin Luther emerged in 2017 for the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, it was a clever play on words. Yes, indeed, on October 31, 1517, the night before All Saints' Day, that "Hallowed Eve," a young priest named Martin Luther literally nailed 95 theses (complaints) to the wooden door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, calling for accountability within the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. He nailed it literally and he "Nailed it!" metaphorically, driving his theological points home with precision and strength, achieving the goal of much needed change. As children of the Reformation, we believe salvation cannot be sold or bought...it is by faith alone. We trust our conscience rather than rules impose to keep people in their place by a hierarchical leadership. Jesus Christ is the only Head of the Church. We affirm the Bible as the infallible Word of God, and we uphold the priesthood of all believers. We are all equal in God's sight.

As we celebrate Reformation Sunday and dedicate our 2023 Stewardship pledges, we honor the rich history of our faith journey, we recognize missed steps along the way, and we give thanks for the fallible men and women of faith, who like Martin, were willing to take risks to see God more clearly, sometimes nailing it and sometimes missing the mark. In the giving of our financial resources, we affirm our faith in the God who calls us to risk, to reach beyond ourselves, and to become a part of something larger than our individual lives. By sharing our time, talent, and treasure we answer God's call to live our faith more authentically and to love in truth and action.

In today's readings, both Habakkuk and Zacchaeus take risks to see God more clearly. Habakkuk has the courage to question God's purpose amid the destruction during the Babylonian exile. Habakkuk risks in persisting with his questions, symbolically climbing a watch post to get a better view, waiting, and watching to see what God would say to him. God assures Habakkuk that a vision will come in due time and encourages him to continue to hold on to what is right and to live by faith, without knowing the answers to his questions. Habakkuk's story is an affirmation for those among us who risk asking God difficult questions and who refuse to accept religious clichés in times of crisis.

Zacchaeus also takes a risk to see God more clearly when Jesus of Nazareth came to Jericho. Word had spread during the first century about this young teacher who brought good news to the poor, gave sight to the blind, and challenged the religious clichés of his day. Zacchaeus, the

chief tax collector, joins the crowd to wait and to watch for Jesus. We don't know what led him to do it; however, to see Jesus, Zacchaeus climbs a sycamore tree which becomes his watch post.

This action is not without risks. He takes the physical risk of a short man climbing a tall tree. He takes the cultural risk of a respectable man participating in child's play. He takes a personal risk of singling himself out by standing above the crowd.

In the act of climbing the Sycamore Tree, one might say Zacchaeus nailed it! Not only did he find a way to see Jesus but also the way for Jesus to see him. This face-to-face encounter with the graciousness of God in the incarnation of Jesus Christ is life changing for Zacchaeus. His response to being in the presence of God and hearing a genuine call to integrity was one of joy, gratitude, and generosity! He announces he will give half of his possessions to the poor and repay anyone he may have defrauded four times as much. This standard of restitution went many times beyond what was required in the Hebrew law. Jesus delights in Zacchaeus' faith and generosity, declaring to all the self-righteous people who have risked nothing and who look down on Zacchaeus that all are equal in God's sight and salvation cannot be sold or bought. Jesus declares Zacchaeus is also a son of Abraham, a child of God, and God's salvation has come to Zacchaeus' house.

We learn from this story that when we welcome Jesus into our home, into our hearts...we are never the same. In the presence of Jesus of Nazareth, Zacchaeus becomes a changed man. The meaning in his life for which he was searching, he finds that day in Jericho.

Jesus' meeting Zacchaeus is the last encounter Luke records before Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem... where being true to God, Jesus will risk in faith, climb the tree, mount the watch post, and sustain the nails of Calvary in an act of incredible self-sacrifice and generosity.

With the questions of Habakkuk, the generosity of Zacchaeus, and the courage of Martin, may we each risk in seeing God more clearly, living our faith more authentically, and loving one another in truth and action. Amen.