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Rev. Anne M. Rosebrock

## MERIDIAN STREET UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

### **THEOLOGY OF STARBUCKS: FOURBUCKS**

*Luke 19:1-10*

Read the cup. The coffee is hot and Starbucks does not apologize for it. The coffee is hot and expensive. It is difficult to get one of those great coffee drinks for less than four dollars, consequently the nickname – Starbucks' nickname -- Fourbucks. It is expensive to enjoy Starbucks coffee, however, Starbucks is selling more than just coffee; they are selling the Starbucks' experience and people line up every day to pay for it.

In many ways, Zacchaeus had it made. He was the chief tax collector, the head customs agent if you will. He was working with the Romans. It was the reverse of Robin Hood. This time it was stealing from the poor to give to the rich. Zacchaeus is the chief thief and he was stealing from his own people to give to his oppressors. Of course, he made sure that he was getting his fair share and a little more. All those who passed down the road through Jericho to Jerusalem were stopped and taxed. At this particular moment in time, thousands were walking on the road from the area of the Galilee north of Jericho moving toward Jerusalem for Passover.

Zacchaeus, who was short of stature, was determined to see Jesus. Maybe he had heard that Jesus had healed a blind man as he was walking down the road. Maybe he had heard about Jesus long before, I have no idea, but on that day, Zacchaeus made it a point to see Jesus. He was a short man and he could not see over the crowd that was walking the road, so he got creative and climbed up the sycamore tree.

Here is one who had struck it rich. He was set for life. He had secured his future. Yet he was small not only of stature, but also of spirit. He was hated by his neighbors because he was a traitor in their eyes and he was never going to be more than a pathetic pawn in the Roman political machine. He was rich in goods, but poor in spirit.

Remember show and tell? I realize that it may have been a while for some of us, but my favorite part of Kindergarten was definitely show and tell. I remember the day that I took my prize baton to show the class. I was so excited to show my new baton. I remember it as if it were yesterday. My hand shot up in the air, I offered an energetic, "Oh, oh, oh," followed by "pick me, pick me, pick me!" I could not wait to have my turn. It was the enthusiasm of youth. I realize that I should have said, choose me, but I was five! It was the eagerness that I remember, the sheer delight in having the opportunity to share with the class.

Zacchaeus had that same energy. He was determined to get a look at Jesus. In so doing, he was hoping that his small spirit would be healed. He realized that he was set financially, but his life was not what he had hoped. He, a Jew, was an outcast with his own people. He was also an

outcast with the people for whom he worked. He was alone, disconnected, rejected. True to Jesus' nature, Jesus looks beyond the road full of people and sees the little man with the tiny spirit in the sycamore tree. Jesus looks up and calls out, "Zacchaeus, come down from that tree!" That encounter alone seems to be enough. Zacchaeus is made new. Transformation seems instantaneous. It is as if he was sitting in the tree crying out, pick me, pick me and to his complete and utter amazement, Jesus does just that.

In that moment, he moves from what he has been to what he could be. He sheds himself from this past and begins living in the Kingdom of God. He begins to live a life he never imagined prior to meeting Jesus.

Would that every one of us would have the same energy and determination of Zacchaeus. The beauty of a life of faith is that it is not a burden, but it does cause us to rethink our actions, to prioritize in a new way, to live differently. It was true for Zacchaeus and it is true for us. As we encounter the love of God, we are changed. Pick me, pick me, Jesus. Let me serve you. Let us serve you. Show us the way. Let our very life be an offering. Let our life be an offering of joy!

We begin this Stewardship Campaign focusing on offering – the giving of self and gifts to God. We offer not as burden or out of guilt, but with joy. We are God's chosen, holy and dearly beloved people. We give in response to the love that God has already given us. We give with dreams of the world that is yet to be fully formed. We give with hope for the future that we are building. We give with confidence that together we are capable of much in the name of Jesus. We give with joy as we celebrate that Jesus has brought salvation to our house, to this holy house this day and every day.

Fourbucks, that's what you will need to purchase a grande latte at Starbucks. Fourbucks--that is twice the amount that more than a billion people on this planet make a day. Fourbucks, twice as much. More than a billion people make two dollars or less a day. It is beyond my ability to imagine. More than a billion people spend each and every day just trying to survive.

You see, our joy does not come from our circumstances. Yes, in comparison to much of the world, we are rich beyond imagination. But the measure of our wealth is not the amount in our bank account or our 401K. It is not in all that we have acquired. The measure of a life is not in the size of our home, but in the depth of our spirit. Zacchaeus understood that – totally and completely. His spirit was released from its small little shell on the day that he gave his life to Jesus. He saw before him an opportunity to make a difference, to live differently, to start fresh and he took it.

In an article entitled *Wake Up and Sell the Coffee*, author Michael Gates Gill tells of finding himself unemployed and alone at 63 years old. Gill begins going to Starbucks day in and day out to have a place to sit and make phone calls in an attempt to find employment. The manager of the Starbucks becomes acquainted with Gill and offers him a job. Gill credits that job at Starbucks with saving his life. Gill learned to make the coffees, to clean the restrooms and to run the cash register. He concludes the article with these words, "Now two years later, still happily perched behind the counter of my neighborhood store serving coffee, I can't say I've morphed into a saint. I'm a work in progress yet. But I'm living fully. Eyes wide open. Soul intact."

(Michael Gates Gill AARP Magazine September/October 2007)

There is joy in offering our life to God this day and every day. There is joy in the offering of our gifts to ministry in the name of Jesus. Our giving is not guilt induced, it is not a burden, it is not a tax. Eyes wide open, living fully, soul intact is the reality of one who has matured in his or her faith. That is the story of Michael Gates Gill, that is the story of Zacchaeus, and there is room in that story for each one of us. Life is an offering to God. Living our life to the fullest is just what Jesus envisioned for us.

I do not pledge because I am a minister. I do not give because I think it will somehow improve my standing with God. I give because I am loved. I give because I want to make a difference in the world. The church is the most important investment in my life and the return on my giving is the joy of participating in the body of Christ. The return on my investment is participating with my life and my gifts to make real the Kingdom of God in our very midst. I spend four bucks at Starbucks and my pleasure is limited to the time it takes to drink a tall chai latte -- not long, not meaningful.

In his best selling book *Giving*, Bill Clinton writes these words, "So much of modern culture is characterized by stories of self-indulgence and self-destruction. So much of modern politics is focused not on honest differences on policy but on personal attacks. So much of modern media is dominated by people who earn fortunes by demeaning others, defining them by their worst moments, exploiting their agonies. Who's happier? The uniters or the dividers? The builders or the breakers? The givers or the takers?" (p.211)

For me, my personal joy is rooted in the building, in finding common ground even if that is just a sliver of ground and in giving from the abundance that I have been given.

We find ourselves in a transition of leadership at Meridian Street. It is not what you or I expected this time last year. Life is full of surprises! As we move into our future together, your faith, your creativity, your imagination, your giving will all be essential. Your life, your faith and your giving will have a significant impact in defining our future.

Come down out of that tree, no need to hide, no need to fear, Jesus is in our midst this day and he has already brought salvation to your house, to my house, and to this holy house of faith.