

I hope that you have been following in our daily reading from the gospels in our special book One Year with Jesus. The reading for today is the story of Zacchaeus. I really wanted to give my next sermon on the story of Ruth, and I thought I would just invoke the principle that allows a preacher to swerve from the given topic to the one he really wanted to talk about. But as I thought about what I would say today, I realized that these stories had a common theme. In fact, I can even expand it a bit more and ask you to consider, "What do the stories of Zacchaeus, Ruth, and David all have in common?"

Zacchaeus

First let's read the story of Zacchaeus, from Luke 19:1-10:

Jesus entered Jericho and was **passing through**. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I **must** stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a **'sinner.'**" But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give **half** of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back **four** times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. **For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.**"

Zacchaeus, even though he had become rich by collecting taxes for the hated Roman Empire, was very interested in seeing Jesus. He was a man of action, who was not content to be pushed around by the throngs of people, but was determined to achieve his goal. So he saw a tree in the distance by the road that Jesus would pass by, and he ran ahead to climb the tree and get a better vantage point. It doesn't seem that he did this to be noticed, but simply so that he could see the man everyone was talking about.

Jesus, in a surprise move, made note of Zacchaeus's efforts and called him down to meet with him. Jesus was "passing through" Jericho, but the actions of Zacchaeus caused him to decide to stay. Jesus obviously could see the heart of the man and knew that he had great potential for the right response to God's message. He invited himself to Zacchaeus's house for dinner, and Zacchaeus gladly accepted.

This story has several lessons for us to think about. The one I want to concentrate on today is that God looks past the surface of our personality into the depths of our hearts. He chooses us for what we are inside, not what we look like, or whether we have great riches. He loves because of what we **want** to be, and in the case of Zacchaeus, he worked in his heart a great repentance. He had been lost and was condemned by others as a sinner, but Zacchaeus wanted Jesus to love him, and that caused him to treat others better. He wanted to pay back, not just what he owed, but four times that amount to make restitution in realization of the hardship that he had caused by his actions. What a great moment that was when he decided to respond to Jesus!

We must love the righteousness, or Goodness, of God. Just as Zacchaeus, in wanting to see better became more visible to others, so we, in showing our love for what is really Good, also become more visible in the Good that we do. God is able to see our hearts in great detail, but it is much harder for us to really understand each other that well.

David

We might say that "**true love looks beyond the surface**". Another great illustration of this principle is the way that God chose David for what was inside him. We read in 1 Samuel 16:4-13:

Samuel did what the LORD said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, "Do you come in peace?" Samuel replied, "Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me." Then **he consecrated Jesse and his sons** and invited them to the sacrifice. When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the LORD." But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look

at the things man looks at. **Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.**" Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, "The LORD has not chosen this one either." Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, "Nor has the LORD chosen this one." Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, "The LORD has not chosen these." So he asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?" "There is still the youngest," Jesse answered, "but he is tending the sheep." Samuel said, "Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives." So he sent and had him brought in. He was ruddy, with a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the LORD said, "Rise and anoint him; he is the one." So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power. Samuel then went to Ramah.

Don't you know that David wanted someone to see beyond all of his older brothers and realize what was in his heart? He was left to do the dirty work of the family while the others did the glorious things. It sounds to me like he missed out on the consecration of the family by Samuel. But David kept God close to his heart all of his life, and God's decision was proved out. God wants something much, much more than just what "looks" Good. We should be searching for this as well in our own relationships.

Ruth

Recently I was given the great privilege of performing the marriage ceremony for my niece Chantelle. This was my first time in this function, and I naturally wanted to say something beyond the standard "Dearly Beloved" message.

Many marriage ceremonies repeat the words that Ruth used to show her love for her mother-in-law. So she wouldn't leave her, and told her (Ruth 1:16-17),

"Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die", and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me."

But if we want to think about marital love, we find that the story of Ruth's later relationship with Boaz shows true romance from a Biblical perspective. God worked His providence, but He coupled it with the fact that Ruth and Boaz were looking for True Love. There is nothing said about whether either one was very attractive physically because it didn't really matter. They may have both been beautiful, but they were more interested in character; they were interested in Goodness.

All of us want someone who, from all of the sea of humanity, chooses us to live with. We want True Love; we want a Soul Mate. But finding a Soul Mate has to do with finding the right things in common; looking for what is Good in a person instead of the physical characteristics that the world regards so highly. The type of love we are talking about endures past the physical things; it is faithful to the end.

In the story of Ruth, you may remember that an Israelite woman named Naomi and her husband left their home because of the famine there and went into another country. Eventually her husband died, and their two sons, who had married women of that country, also died, leaving no children. After ten years, the famine back home had ended and Naomi decided to return home.

Her two daughters-in-law obviously loved Naomi very much and were ready to go back with her. But Naomi asked them to go home after they had packed and were on the way. She wanted them to find other husbands and think of their own happiness. Naomi called them daughters, but did not expect them to stay connected, as she could not provide more sons for them to marry.

At first they **both** said that they would go with Naomi. We forget that Orpah was good, too! But Ruth clung to Naomi and simply wouldn't let go. Ruth understood that as a widow, Naomi could starve to death without someone to help support her. When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her to leave her.

They created quite a stir back in Israel when they returned. Naomi, whose name meant "pleasant", told people to call her "bitter". Naomi blamed God for her misfortune, but she still asked for His providential power for her loved ones. And later we see that she fully believed in that providence.

Once they settled in their new home, Ruth offered to go to the fields and glean grain. God sent her to a relative of Naomi's husband, a man of character. Boaz was evidently a true man of God; God was part of his life as He was a part of his daily greeting, "The LORD be with you!" The people around him knew it to be real.

Ruth was a hard worker and rested very little. Boaz, who was evidently not married, noticed Ruth and asked the foreman of his harvesters, "Whose young woman is that?" Something in Boaz wants to find out more about Ruth.

Boaz spoke to her, calling her daughter (as Naomi had done), and told her to stay in his field to glean. He also protected her by telling his workers not to bother her. He told them to make sure and leave grain for her to find. He provided for her in this way, and by giving her water to drink. Here we are witnesses to the beginning of this romance.

Ruth was amazed and humble; she bowed her face to the ground to honor Boaz. She did not expect such favor. She thought that she had no "standing", but Ruth's reputation for Good is what interested Boaz. We find that he provided again and again throughout the account in the book of Ruth. He gave her special attention, and made sure she had food to carry home to Naomi. Naomi gave praise to God, and told Ruth that she had found a **kinsman-redeemer** that could really help her. So Ruth stayed to glean in Boaz's fields and live with Naomi.

Then one day Naomi decided that she needed to find a home for Ruth, and she formulated a plan. It was evidently some time between the moment that Naomi realizes that Boaz is the kinsman-redeemer and when she implemented her plan. This was probably to give more time for the romance to blossom. And Ruth followed the plan to the letter.

She had Ruth go down to the threshing floor all dolled up and scented with perfume. When Boaz was went to bed and fell asleep after dinner, she lay down beside him. Naomi knew that Boaz would be a gentleman, but would take this as a sign of great interest in him.

When Boaz discovered her there, she asked for redemption under the Levitical Law. He was very flattered that she had not run after the richer or younger (and most likely more attractive) men, and he agreed to take care of her if a nearer relative refused his duty. He had her stay most of the night there, and sent her away early with another load of grain.

When Ruth returned home to Naomi, she reported everything Boaz had said and done. Naomi knew that he was a man of action who would not rest until he had settled the matter.

Boaz was pretty clever when he presented the situation to the nearer relative in front of the town council. He treated it as just a piece of land, and then when the man was about to agree he brought in the need to accept the foreigner Ruth as a part of the deal. For some reason, the man felt that this would affect his own estate, and Boaz got what he was after. So Boaz took Ruth as his wife and she later gave birth to the grandfather of King David.

The important lesson to me is that Boaz looked beyond the surface: Ruth was a foreigner; she was previously married; she was much older than the typical marriageable age, having been married for ten years; and she was possibly barren, having had no children in ten years of marriage. But Ruth was a good, hard worker who cared passionately for others. Her reputation for Good is what interested Boaz.

Ruth saw in Boaz a true man of God, who was respected by his people. He wanted to protect Ruth, and he provided for her in many ways. He was a man of action who claimed her when she needed a redeemer or savior.

Purpose

The point that I am trying make is not **just** that God sees what's inside us, but that we want to find someone that sees what is right inside of us; who knows us for what we really are. That someone is God; he sees our true self, the Good in our self (even though there might only be a spark), and doesn't judge just from the outside. We won't be the last ones picked for the game if we truly love God, even though we are sinners.

We also want to have this kind of relationship with other people. But we tend to think in our relationship with others, especially God, as to whether we are getting this or getting that; or if we are having something happen that we want to happen. What God wants is a **relationship**; this means that as we go to this event or that event, and this happens or that happens, we should just want him to be with there with us. This was the relationship that I believe that Ruth and Naomi had; they were in this together. Naomi had suffered such great tragedy with her husband and son, and though she renamed herself "bitter" she still saw God's providence in the interaction between Ruth and Boaz. I believe that Ruth and Boaz also had this relationship because they believed in the same things.

Any other means of developing relationships besides that where there is communion of the hearts is counterfeit. Relationships built on money, looks, reputation, or prestige are just not very solid. Jesus says in Luke 11:38-40,

But the Pharisee, noticing that Jesus did not first wash before the meal, was surprised. Then the Lord said to him, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the **outside** of the cup and dish, but **inside** you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also?"

There are many who, like the Pharisees, are too busy whitewashing themselves to try to make themselves look good. They may try to accomplish this through the rules that they keep (and demand that others do also), and the outward appearance of spirituality. They don't want anyone, especially God, to know what they are really like on the inside. They cannot bear that level of scrutiny.

I want someone who sees the real me, who sees my real heart; it's the only part that I really have any control over; as bad as it is, it's my best shot. And similarly, we must look for Good in the hearts of others. The Good is there if we know what to look for in other people.

Jesus

We must realize that Jesus also wants to be known and loved because of His Goodness. We see in Isaiah 52-53 that he was not meant to be attractive physically:

Isaiah 52:14; Just as there were many who were appalled at him -- his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness—

Isaiah 53:2-5; He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

How can we understand the sacrifice and not be drawn to His Goodness? Jesus wants us to be known for the Goodness that was inside Him; not for external things, such as whether he could supply an army or look like a king, or perform great miracles. We must be attracted to him because of his great sacrificial love for us.

Conclusion

What do the stories of Zacchaeus, David, and Ruth have in common? They all have to do with being **chosen from the heart**. We must look past the surface of those around us and try to know their hearts.

In the last part of the story of Zacchaeus, we see that the important conclusion to the story is that Jesus came to seek and save the lost. Zacchaeus was lost, but Jesus found him and he was changed.

In the recent World Trade Center disaster, we saw many who were searching desperately for the lost, without regard for whether they were good or bad, financial tycoons or janitors. We count them as great heroes. Should we not magnify Jesus even more?

Jesus loves us in spite of our sin. He looks into our hearts and knows us as we really are. He looks for a love of the Good that lives there; it is what He gave His life for. We need to respond to him by accepting Him as our Saviour.