

Stepping outside our Comfort Zone
Luke 19:1-10

Brothers and sisters in Christ, are you comfortable? Are you seated ok? Your chair isn't too hard or too soft – do you fit in it ok? Not too tight?

What about the temperature? It can get a bit hot in here with the air-conditioning, how is it... ok? Do we need to turn on the fans or open a window?

What about the music so far this morning? Did you like it? Did the band sing any of your favorite songs? 'How can I keep from Singing' is one of mine – really like that one. And I know we can crank out the volume sometimes – but was the audio mix ok? Do we need to make any adjustments in it so that its easier to listen to?

And oh – I almost forget, as we're starting the sermon maybe you want to go and get a cup of coffee? And I think there might even be some leftover snack cakes from Men's breakfast at the coffee station as well.

There's nothing like settling in to listen to a good sermon with a nice cup of coffee in one hand and a snack in the other, right!?

Brothers and sisters, whether it's at church or in our homes or at work or in our cars, we are naturally creatures of comfort. If something makes us uncomfortable, we'll get motivated to do something about it - won't we? So we can get back... to being comfortable.

However, if there's something really important to us – then we will often endure being uncomfortable and put up with it in order to achieve it, obtain it, experience it.

Parents will put up with being uncomfortable financially in order to make sure their children go to certain schools...

Guys will put up with being uncomfortable physically, from a sprain or an injury because they really want to compete, to play their sport, to be a part of the game, the winning team, to win in spite of the odds.

Women, you put up with a lot of uncomfortable stuff because, as I heard many a lady say over the years, that's the price of beauty! Primping and plucking and shaving, stuffing and tucking, and wearing high heels... its uncomfortable - but you look beautiful! and we men thankyou for it.

And teenagers... teens will put up with being uncomfortable at the bus stop in -20 weather, with a windchill of -30, because they don't want to go to school looking like a dork, having to wear a toque and a scarf, mittens and boots... because they are too cool... so cool, they will literally freeze for it.

Brothers and sisters, you can tell what people value, by what they will endure being uncomfortable for. What is it that makes them willing to step out of their comfort zone...

I have a vivid memory from when I was a teenager, I really wanted to join a group of skateboarders who were hanging out near my house, but I was soooo uncomfortable with the idea of just skating up to them and trying to hang with them – like who did I think I was!?

But, eventually my desire to be a part of the group won out over feeling uncomfortable, and I went for it and skated in to hang out with them. Sure, it was a bit awkward at first... but after I landed a few tricks I had their respect and we hung out.

Now, I'd never really considered it before – and maybe you haven't either, but that's probably what its like for a lot of people who are being drawn to God, to Jesus by the Holy Spirit and are thinking about coming to church.

Maybe you're here at Valleyview and you remember what it was like to come here for the first time – worried that it was going to be uncomfortable and awkward... but thank God you eventually pushed past that and came here and it worked out and you're part of our group now.

But what about all the people who haven't pushed past that, who maybe can't get past being uncomfortable with just coming out to a new church as a visitor, unsure of what it will be like, what its all about, and missing out on what God wants to do in their lives?

If we think about that – that there are people who are supposed to be here; supposed to be hearing about saving faith in Jesus Christ, knowing the joy of being forgiven and included in God’s family, receiving the Holy Spirit and being transformed in their lives... but they aren’t, because its uncomfortable to just drop into a new church. How do you feel about that?

So, I wonder brothers and sisters... are we really comfortable with that? Or... is that something we are uncomfortable with?

And if we’re not 100% comfortable with that, brothers and sisters – we need to start preparing ourselves to step out of our comfort zones – the places, the social circles, the routines, the habits which we have become comfortable with, in order to fix something that makes us uncomfortable.

Our comfort zones are a good gift from God, brothers and sisters and we give Him thanks for their blessings, but they must never be an excuse to neglect or disobey our Lord’s command to Go out – in order to make disciples of all nations.

And as the Lord leads us from being Valleyview into becoming Spring Valley, becoming something new... we’ve discerned that he’s also leading us into this new way (for us) of making disciples *by going out*. Not being comfortable with only those who are brave enough to come here.

And we have our Lord’s own example to follow in this, brothers and sisters. He not asking us to do anything that he himself was not willing to do. Leaving behind what it meant to be God, becoming clothed with our humanity – being born of a woman as Jesus, to a despised people, in scandalous circumstances – born in an animal feeding trough...

Thus Paul writes in Philippians 2:5-8 that we are to have *“the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!”*

Now, I do not wish to belittle the wondrousness of the Incarnation by saying it's simply an example of Jesus being willing to step out of His comfort zone, it's far more than that.

But... what Christ did through incarnating himself certainly does challenge our hesitancy or resistance, to not only step out of our comfort zones, but go further and go into places where *we are uncomfortable*... so that we may do what Jesus says he came to do in vs. 10 of our scripture reading this morning, that he came *"to seek and save the lost."*

So let us take a closer look at what the gospel of Luke presents to us as an example of how the Word of God incarnate went about that work of seeking and saving the lost.

Luke tells us that Jesus had entered the city of Jericho and that He intended simply to pass through the city.

You see friends, in his life and ministry Jesus had spent much time out in the surrounding countryside with his disciples, you might say it had become a comfort zone for them.

There was a comfortable routine of teaching the crowds, ministering to people, performing healings and miracles, getting away to pray, going from one place to another...

But, Jesus knew that as important as this work was – it was not enough to accomplish God's plan. To do that He needed to make his way down to Jerusalem to offer his life as a sacrifice for the covenant unfaithfulness of Israel and all humanity.

So in Luke 13:32-33 Jesus says *"I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!"*

And so Jesus begins to make his way towards Jerusalem and He tries to explain to the disciples why they are going there

In Luke 18:31-34 it says *"Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be*

fulfilled. He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again.” The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.”

Brothers and sisters, the disciples were comfortable with Jesus talking about fulfilling messianic prophecies of the Son of Man because that was going to solve a situation that they were uncomfortable with – being oppressed by the Romans.

So it made sense to them that Jesus would go to Jerusalem in order to proclaim himself King and start the liberation of God’s people from there.

It didn’t make sense that Jesus as the Son of Man would go to be tortured and mocked and die... and come back to life??? They weren’t so comfortable with that – and they didn’t really understand it.... but – they were Jesus’ followers... so regardless of whether they understood him or and being somewhat uncomfortable with the suffering and dying part

they still followed Jesus, the Son of Man, on his determined path down to Jerusalem to offer his life for ALL of humanity.

Now this isn’t just an important mission - its the ultimate mission isn’t it? There’s no room for deviating from the plan – Jesus on His way to Jerusalem to offer his life... so it makes sense that as the scripture passage says, Jesus just intended to pass through Jericho. No plans to linger, to visit... to shop... or even to do some teaching and healing for the many people in this city who most certainly were in need of it. Arriving on time in Jerusalem for the Passover was more important.

And yet... in the midst of that bustling city, full of loyal, Torah-abiding Jewish citizens who were waiting for the Messiah to come and free them from oppression, who crowded the streets in eager expectation when they heard that Jesus was in their city – Jesus makes an unexpected stop for an opportunistic traitor, insisting that He needed to visit Zacchaeus’s home then and there.

Brothers and sisters, if you are not familiar with this story – you are most certainly familiar with the fact that people throughout history are uncomfortable with those who have to collect taxes, and even more uncomfortable with them when it's one of your own citizens who is collecting on behalf of your oppressors and getting rich from doing so.

And Zacchaeus was their leader...

And as such he was a bit of an opportunistic fellow – maybe he had heard a bit about this Jesus who was travelling in the countryside teaching and doing miracles – but since you can't tax teaching and miracles, at least outside of his jurisdiction anyways - he probably hadn't paid much attention.

So Zacchaeus is a bit late to the party when Jesus arrives in Jericho. The crowds of people have already lined the street when this comes to Zacchaeus' attention and probably more out of sheer curiosity than anything else Zacchaeus wants to see this person, this Jesus, whom the people are so eager to see.

But, it could also very well be that Zacchaeus – being a Jew himself – was familiar with the prophecy of a messiah, the Son of Man, who would deliver Israel from Roman oppression.

And now that Jesus had entered a major city center Zacchaeus might have wanted see Jesus, to take stock of him, determine for himself if this so-called messiah had the goods to lead a rebellion and drive out the Romans.

If Jesus did... then Zacchaeus might need to reconsider where his loyalties lay, and figure out how to switch sides. Things might get uncomfortable otherwise and he needed to fix that.

So – since he was a short man and he could not see over the crowds of people along the road, Zacchaeus quickly moved ahead on the route through the city and found a low growing tree with sturdy branches which he could easily climb on to and have a comfortable vantage point to take stock of Jesus.

However, instead of Zacchaeus taking stock of Jesus, Jesus stops and takes stock of Zacchaeus.

Instead of Zacchaeus being able to determine if Jesus has the needed qualities to pull off a rebellion, Jesus determines that Zacchaeus is someone who needed to be drawn back from his own rebellion and greed and what it's done to him spiritually and socially.

So in spite of His important agenda to get to Jerusalem, Jesus pauses for this greedy, unscrupulous, traitor and insists that He fellowship with Zacchaeus right then and there.

Zacchaeus doesn't need to worry about switching sides – Jesus has recruited him, in fact - Jesus' has done more than that.

Jesus' willingness to associate with him changes Zacchaeus' heart, and when the crowds of people start to protest this action by Jesus pointing out the truth about Zacchaeus, Jesus does not deny Zacchaeus' sins – rather He uses this to set up the opportunity for Zacchaeus to admit to his sins, and make restitution for what he had done wrong.

And by the mysterious grace of God he does. He is uncomfortable about what he's done and he does something to fix that.

And lest anyone charge that Zacchaeus is simply being pragmatic here, Zacchaeus goes above and beyond in his restitution. He gives half of his possessions to the poor – an act of generosity which reveals his heart was no longer controlled by greed.

And instead of the minimum 1 and 1/5 which the Law of Moses required to be paid back for cheating and swindling someone, Zacchaeus willingly offers to pay back four times the amount.

This is no legalistic calculated move on his part – it is a genuine act of repentance – in fact Jesus considers it to be an act of faith in God's Covenant promises to be a gracious and forgiving God because He calls Zacchaeus a son of Abraham – the one who lived by faith in God's promises. Promises that

were made by God, and had to be accepted and received by faith because they wouldn't be fulfilled until much later on...

In calling Zacchaeus a son of Abraham, Jesus clarifies that Zacchaeus' repayment and his charity are not what restores him – it is God's promises to Abraham, being fulfilled in the Law of Moses, AND Jesus' own coming sacrifice in Jerusalem that restore Zacchaeus.

So Jesus brings the focus back to the purpose of His mission to Jerusalem, where He will pay the true cost of Zacchaeus' sins, the sins of his household – for all of Israel... for all humanity... by offering his life in their place, in our place.

And thus it is implied in what Jesus says that the Son of Man is not the kind of messiah who is coming to destroy the enemies of God and of God's people – but to reconcile them to God, to restore them back into the family of God... and if we're talking about Abraham, we can't forget that God's intentions and specific promises was to bless ALL nations through him...

So truly *“the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost!”* and he is willing to interrupt His all-important mission to Jerusalem, for the sake of one scandalous person who needs to experience the reality of what Jesus' mission will accomplish.

Brothers and sisters in Christ may we will be willing to allow the Holy Spirit to lead us out of our comfort zone in the same way.

It starts as we go from here today – from where we are comfortable talking about Jesus and sin and salvation and all the great things that God is doing in our lives...

And as we go out of this comfort zone – into our other comfort zones where we are focused the important work and tasks of our schooling, or work, or family...

Let us pay attention for those moments when the Holy Spirit brings people across our path who are too uncomfortable to come to church, but comfortable enough to encounter us.

And let's not miss the opportunity because we're more comfortable with sticking to our routine, too uncomfortable to engage with them and build a connection because that would feel awkward and we might not know what to say or do...

Brothers and sisters may we be sensitive and responsive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit as our Lord was – and look up and see that person in front of us, put our important agenda on pause for a moment, push pass the awkwardness and feeling uncomfortable and say – Hi! What's your name?!

And may we be given the humility to remember that we are just sinners, saved by faith in Jesus Christ – and that even this faith we have is given to us as a gift.

Because the Lord may put someone in our path who, like Zacchaeus, is well and truly an unrepentant sinner in some way or another – and drawing close to them with the love of Jesus will really be a step of our moral comfort zone.

Their behavior, their lifestyle may be rightly uncomfortable for us and we may be worried that engaging with them is a tacit approval of their choices... that they will ruin our reputation because of association...or we're afraid that they might harm us because they seem dangerous...

These things might all be true friends – in fact I wouldn't be surprised if they were.

But, what are you more uncomfortable with? Their sin – or the fact that no one survives God's judgement on sin without being forgiven in Jesus Christ?

Where would we be if our Lord was comfortable with that? If that had not moved Him willingly subjected His divine nature to step out of His comfort zone to take on our human nature?

Where would we be if our Lord had not left the safety and security of the countryside and turned his face towards Jerusalem?

Where would we be if our Lord was the kind of Messiah whose first coming was about judgement and retribution for our unfaithfulness? Wherever it might be friends – it would not be comfortable.

So, let us push out of our comfort zone to engage and serve the person whom the Lord puts in our path and draws our attention to this coming week – let us simply, like Jesus did, draw close to them, in their comfort zone.

And brothers and sisters in Christ, this is hard for me to say because I'm all about clarity and making sure people know the truth – but as I've read about Jesus' interactions with people I've noticed that He seems to have the effect of convicting the sinners of their sins, without having to critically point it out. The only people for whom this did not occur were those who were self-righteous.

So, it's ok to step into their comfort zone, draw near and embrace those who are sinners as we once were. Let the Holy Spirit do His work through you so they become

uncomfortable with their sin, and you become comfortable to tell them about Jesus and forgiveness.

And if you are still a bit uncomfortable with this brothers and sisters... ask the Lord to make you more comfortable with it by having you become much more uncomfortable with the fact that these people aren't just going to wander in here by themselves...

After all brothers and sisters – were it not for the Lord being uncomfortable that we were lost, and being willing to get out of His comfort zone to do something about it... we would still be comfortably on our way to face judgement without a savior. And we should not be comfortable that anyone in our path having to face that either.

So, brothers and sisters... I'll ask you again – are you... comfortable?

Let's GO – and make disciples of all nations. Amen.