

**"Responding to Grace"**

**Scripture Passages:** 1) Luke 19:1-10  
2) Mark 10:46-52  
3) John 8:1-11

**Stewardship as Response:** Last Sunday I defined stewardship as living life as a response to our true identity as the people of God, as the children of God, as Disciples of the Living Christ.

**Identity:** The key here is the issue of identity. What is our identity? What defines who we are and how we choose to live? How we think about our identity shapes our beliefs, our emotional reactions, and our actions.

If I primarily think of my identity as the son of Vern Abbott, then I am going to live my life in response to my dad. I am going to spend my life trying to please my dad. I am going to base my decision making on how my dad makes decisions. I am going to respond to anxiety and crisis as I learned from my dad. My dad is obviously a big part of who I am, but do I want my dad to be the foundation, upon which I build my life? Or do I have a different identity than Vern's son?

Scripture clearly teaches us that our core identity is as the People of God. Genesis teaches us that we have been made in God's image. Throughout Scripture we learn that God's very Spirit dwells in us and among us. God's very Spirit is a part of us. Our deepest self is defined as a child of God.

As Vern's son I have learned a lot from my dad. I am grateful for all that my dad has taught me. The reality is, however, that God has much more to teach me than my dad is able to teach me. If I am fully going to embrace who I have been created to be then I want to be a Disciple of God. I want to learn how to be and live from the one who knows me better than anyone, the one who created me, the one who knew me by name before I was born.

**The Jesus Gift:** Of course the great gift that God has given us is that God loves us so much that God took on flesh and came and lived among us, so that we could learn how to live from God's very example. The point being that as we follow Jesus' example we become more and more true to who God has made us to be. As we follow Jesus' example we create a stronger and stronger foundation for the living of our lives. Being a Disciple of Jesus is living most fully as who God created us to be and living from the strongest foundation possible. We become the healthiest stewards of our own lives by living as disciples of Jesus. So what does living as a disciple of Jesus look like?

**The Different Stories and Their Characters:** I have chosen three stories for our consideration today as we ponder what it looks like to live as disciples of Jesus. Each of these stories is filled with characters. Some of the characters are more prominent than others, but everyone in the stories is a child of God. Just as every one of us here is a child of God, and just as every human being on the planet is a child of God, every character in these stories is a child of God.

Each of these characters the main characters as well as the ancillary characters is there so we can see how Jesus interacts and responds to these children of God. In these characters we see ourselves and our own life choices. In some way we are these characters. So as Jesus interacts with these characters Jesus interacts with us. From these interactions we learn how God interacts with us and how we are called to interact with others as we seek to live as disciples of Jesus, as we seek to live a life of response. **Zacchaeus.** We began to prepare for this time of worship

listening to the delightful Biblical story of Zacchaeus, the wee little tax-man.

Of course we can only speculate about Zacchaeus, but without too much trouble we can put ourselves in his shoes. For instance, we all know in our own way what it feels like to be different from everyone else. Zacchaeus grew up being the smallest. That was the burden of his childhood. We each probably had our own version of that burden. Zacchaeus was probably picked on. This was long before programs to overcome bullying. He was probably the last one to get picked during gym class. He grew up feeling inferior. That inferior feeling weighed on his heart just as it weighs on our hearts.

The older Zacchaeus got the more anger he carried around with him. He dreamed of getting even. So when the opportunity came to get back at his neighbors, he jumped at it. When the Romans were looking for tax collectors, Zacchaeus signed up immediately. All of a sudden, the wee little man had all the power of Rome behind him as he went around and collected taxes from all the folks who had picked on him. For a while he was in heaven, but then his heart began to ache. His new life gave him power, but he was more lonely than before. It wasn't long before Zacchaeus longed for something different. He longed for a new beginning. He longed for someone to see him for who he really was. He longed for someone to see something other than his small stature or his despicable job. He longed to be known.

He couldn't believe it when, as he hung from that tree, Jesus stopped and looked up into his eyes. In that moment Zacchaeus knew that Jesus saw and understood all his pain, all his hurt, all his baggage. Amazingly, Jesus called out Zacchaeus' name and invited himself over for dinner. No one had ever wanted to eat with Zacchaeus before. Jesus' simple little act of seeing Zacchaeus as a precious child of God filled Zacchaeus with grace, an experience he had never known before. Zacchaeus would never be the same again. He would forever live his life in response to that gift of grace.

**Bartimaeus:** Bartimaeus had been blind his whole life. As a child his family took care of him, but as he got older he had to figure out how to support himself.

In that culture there was no Department of Human Services. There was no commission for the blind. In that culture as in many cultures today there was one choice. Bartimaeus found a good spot on the side of the road, a spot where people passed frequently. Every day Bartimaeus went to that spot. Every day he put out his cup and hoped that people would take pity on him. That had been his life for many years. Then one day Jesus walked by.

Jesus saw other possibilities for Bartimaeus. Jesus knew that blindness was not the last word. When Jesus healed Bartimaeus he filled his life with grace and possibility. Forever, Bartimaeus would live his life in response to the gift of grace.

Listen to one more story. **Read John 8:1-11.**

**The Woman:** We don't know anything about this woman's story except that her life choices reminded all of her neighbors of their own weakness and fragility. Somehow the woman's poor choices felt threatening. Consequently, they were going to kill her. Somehow that was going to ease their conscience and bring healing to the community.

Jesus walked into that insanity and turned the tables upside down. Jesus said, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Amazingly the crowd that day was self-aware enough that no one threw a stone. History would suggest that there has never been such a self-aware crowd again. That woman's life and that community were filled with grace that day. They lived the rest of their lives in response to that tremendous gift of grace.

**Conclusion:** Zacchaeus, Bartimaeus, the woman, their lives would forever be different because they were aware of God's gift of grace poured out upon them. That same gift of grace is

available to all of us, to everyone in the world. Like Zacchaeus, like Bartimaeus, like the woman God's grace is for us. The question is, are we ready to receive it?

When we are, when we choose to accept God's gift then like Zacchaeus, Bartimaeus and the woman our lives will never be the same. When we accept God's gift of grace we have no choice but to live our lives in response to that gift. When we know God's grace in our lives, our lives will forever be turned upside down and inside out because we will begin to live as instruments of God's grace in the world. We will forever be different.

Stewardship is living our lives as a response to God's amazing grace. Does that describe us?  
Amen.