

Hello everyone

Jesus is travelling this morning and he is heading for Jerusalem.

But he stops off on the way at Jericho.

On the way

That's a bit of a magic phrase in the bible, isn't it?

The disciples follow Jesus on the way.

We say we follow on our way with Jesus.

Jericho is also an important place to be on your way to or through in the Bible.

It is mentioned around 70 times.

It's the site of Joshua's triumph when the walls come tumbling down. An event also mentioned in the letter to the Hebrews.

And It's the site of the inn where the wounded man finds rest in the story of the good Samaritan.

Jesus is passing through Jericho and this is a city where maybe we've been set up to expect surprises.

And today we get one, don't we?

We meet Zacchaeus climbing a sycamore tree so that he can see Jesus.

But Jesus seems to see him first and calls him down.

I must stay at your house today

Luke tells us a funny story, doesn't he?

How often have we acted this out. I remember when we were at St Matthew's in the middle of Perth, we acted this out as a family. One of us, either Jennifer or Andrew was Zacchaeus up near the top of a step ladder which was festooned in paper leaves.

I was leading the crowd which probably made Jennifer Jesus and Norma the narrator.

Luke never tires of telling us that Jesus was friendly with the wrong sorts of people like Tax collectors.

We've seen Jesus praise a tax collector in the temple at prayer. Jesus chose to include a tax collector as a disciple and Zacchaeus' name means righteousness. So the signals are clear. We have an inkling that the stories of the man Jesus calls down to make him a meal might become a better person.

This is a point of change for Zacchaeus on his way through Jericho and through life. It needs to be a point for us to take note of too.

Through this story, Luke uses a place, Jericho to link Jesus, Zacchaeus and us to the old Testament.

This stands as one story yet we are just passing through Jericho too and in that motion we are made part of the whole sweep of the Bible story from creation onwards. This is not an end point for anyone. Not Zacchaeus not Jesus and not us today.

Yes, Jesus stops for the night, but then he travels onto the future, to the cross and through the empty tomb as he shows us what living in the kingdom of Heaven actually means here, now and in eternity.

A moment of change for Zacchaeus too and maybe one for those watching from the crowd, who knows? They witness the change in Zacchaeus: not just that he gives so much to the poor, but the complete promise made to Jesus to change his life forever. Today salvation has come to this house, Jesus says

And If you've ever wondered about how to describe churchy words like salvation or saving the lost to those you meet.

Here it is in action in an amusing story from the first century which in this day and age maybe seems a little non PC.

Putting the two recent stories of tax collectors together. The point Jesus makes through Luke becomes very clear. Salvation or being saved is not just about realising you need to change your life but walking with god and actually changing.

That's Jesus, the Messiah for you. He confronts us and makes us decide to follow him on the way or not.

We are all passing through lockdown to a life where we want to take up pastimes, hobbies, work and family life again. But it seems it may not feel like it did at the start of the year, not at first at least.

But it's strange, as I thought of my cat's reluctance to change food this week, I realised that I've got used to lockdown life. There's a quiet reassurance of stopping in

Jericho remembering the past and wondering about the future.

Yes, I miss friends and family, but now like Zacchaeus, like the crowd and like Jesus that day we have to move on our way and face changes.

We face up to walking on the way from Jericho into the future. We bring out into the community what we have discovered about ourselves, our past and others as we meet others. We get to work out anew what we really value.

Maybe we remember the solitude, the lack of socialising or shopping or maybe we long for the holidays and day trips we would have taken.

As we do that as part of the world wide crowd round Jesus maybe we will be rethinking some of how church works too.

But one thought needs to stand before our eyes and that is how following Jesus requires each of us to put those in need first and that Jesus still chooses to build the kingdom of god on earth through a very diverse range of people who experience god in many different ways. There is not one template for the church.

But together, gathered, we are the church.

So, look excitedly on the next steps from lockdown because we go on the way with our friends yes, but Jesus too.

What do you see as you look back before lockdown?

How has lockdown affected your view of life's priorities and church as we go on our way into the future together and with Jesus?

Peace be with you.

Amen.