

Spiritual Reactive Attachment Disorder

1. Warm up: When you were a kid and just beginning to think about your career aspirations, what did you tell your parents you wanted to be when you grew up?
2. No kid has ever said, “When I grow up, I want to be a mobster or a foreign collaborator,” because nobody wants to be despised and hated. But in this week’s Gospel story, we encountered someone named Zacchaeus who was the ancient equivalent of a mobster and collaborator. Our Gospel passage tells us what happened when Jesus encountered this despised man. Let’s begin by re-reading the story, Luke 19:1-10, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Verse 1 tells us that Zacchaeus was a wealthy tax collector. That means he was a Jewish man collecting taxes from his own people on behalf of the occupying Roman forces. Roman tax collectors collected taxes directly from people and were also allowed to collect a “commission” for their efforts. Tax collectors were notorious for collecting aggressive commissions. For all this, they were hated. So what could have possibly motivated Zacchaeus to be a tax collector?
 - b. The Jewish people regarded tax collectors as “unclean,” essentially rendering them “untouchable.” If religiously “clean” Jews came into contact with unclean people, they themselves became unclean. So unclean people were banned from spiritual community and the inner courts of the temple. Clean people refused to eat with them, enter their homes, or allow them to enter their homes. Basically, unclean people were excluded from both spiritual and social community. How might that have affected Zacchaeus emotionally and spiritually?
 - c. When have you felt most rejected by others – personally or spiritually? How did that feel and how did it affect you?
3. Despite all the religious rejection Zacchaeus experienced, he seems to have felt strangely drawn to Jesus, a renowned religious teacher. Perhaps he had heard of Jesus’ big heart for spiritual rejects. But verse 3 tells us that there were people standing between him and Jesus prevented him from being able to see Jesus. Don’t miss the symbolism of that.
 - a. Sometimes people get in the way of our ability to see Jesus. Has someone ever gotten in the way of your ability to see Jesus? What happened?
 - b. Looking back, do you regret that you may have, at one time or another, gotten in the way of somebody else’s ability to see Jesus? What happened?
 - c. When a child is consistently denied love as an infant, it can leave deep scars that cause that child to react by detaching emotionally and becoming unable to receive love even when eventually surrounded by loving people. Maybe it’s because they’ve been so hurt, they can’t bear to open themselves up again and become vulnerable. So they detach and observe life from a safe emotional distance. Psychologists call this Reactive Attachment Disorder. Jeff suggested Zacchaeus

had a form of Spiritual Reactive Attachment Disorder. He felt powerfully drawn to Jesus, but didn't dare get too close for fear of rejection. So instead of breaking through the crowd and coming face-to-face with Jesus, he climbed a tree to view him from the safe distance. Have you ever known someone who had Spiritual Reactive Attachment Disorder? What caused it? How did it affect them?

4. Given all we've discussed so far, imagine how stunned Zacchaeus was when Jesus said, "Hurry and come down [from the tree,] for I must stay at your house today." Zacchaeus must have almost fallen out of the tree. "What! *You*, Jesus, want to come to *my* house?"
 - a. When in your life have you been stunned by someone unexpectedly extending a radical welcome to you? How did that make you feel?
 - b. The grace Zacchaeus experienced when Jesus shattered social and spiritual barriers to befriend him seems to have jolted him into spiritual life. This is apparently what the Bible means when it says, "By grace you [are] saved through faith." Ephesians 2:8. How would you define "grace"? Why is grace the only thing that can jolt us into spiritual life? Why is faith necessary to receive grace?
 - c. Jesus wants to do for each of us the same thing he did for Zacchaeus. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus says, "Behold, I am standing at the door knocking. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into them and eat with them, and them with me." What does that verse mean?
5. We know that the jolt of grace Jesus gave Zacchaeus saved him because this encounter with Jesus changed Zacchaeus in profound ways. His outward behavior changed in ways that evidenced an inward transformation. Zacchaeus promised to quit cheating and to make restitution for past cheating. He also promised to give half his wealth to the poor. These are two powerful examples of how an authentic encounter with Jesus changes us. When people see that kind of change in us, they're able to see Jesus through us.
 - a. How has Jesus affected your ethics? Tell us about a time when you did the right thing because it was the right thing, even though it was costly to you personally.
 - b. How has Jesus affected your approach to money? Has your relationship with him made you less greedy and more generous in concrete ways you can point to?
 - c. Of course, spiritual transformation is always a work in progress. The miracle of grace is ongoing in each of us. None of us wants to be a wall that blocks people from seeing Jesus. We all want to become a window through which others can

see him. What's a growing edge in your life right now that you believe needs work so others can see Jesus more clearly in you?

Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. ²A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax-collector and was rich.

³He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. ⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way.

⁵When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.' ⁶So he hurried down and received him joyfully. ⁷All who saw it began to grumble and said, 'He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.'

⁸Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, 'Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.' ⁹Then Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.'