

Luke 19 1-10

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man there was named Zacchaeus: he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a Sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When 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." So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it begin to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." Zacchaeus 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." Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

If there is a will, there is a way might be a rendering of this story. Zacchaeus was not a popular person anymore than the IRS and other tax regulators are today. Do we treat them contemptuously because of their jobs or their true character. It is difficult to know if Jesus was requiring a change of heart from Zacchaeus or was acknowledging his innate good. Certainly, Jesus knew that Zacchaeus was associated with the powerful and an agent of those in power who extended their burden on his fellow citizens. Why would Jesus respond to one such as him? The crowd is irate and maybe even feels betrayed by Jesus. Likely for all of us, God sees with different eyes.

Greg Mortenson in his two books on setting up schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan could be a modern version of things being possible despite lack of resources. While Zacchaeus had financial resources, it was his belief in Jesus that allowed him to reach out and respond. Greg was attempting to climb a mountain in Pakistan but falls sick and after almost dying is brought to a small village, Korphe where he recuperates and learns the customs of the region. He sees the children trying to study without a school house and decides to build them one with the emphasis being on reaching out to girls not just boys. He returns to the United States and sells all that he can to raise money to fund this school. He founds the Central Asia Institute and continues to seek funds to build the first school and later many more schools. It took him three years to complete this first school. During his stay in 1999, warriors from the most remote province in Afghanistan rode many days journey to ask Greg and the CAI to build a school in their remote area. It took 10 years and a lot of creativity to accomplish this goal but it happened. The total community rallied together and along with staff from the CAI who believed in the project finally the school was built even in the middle of a war.

The Kirghiz lived in the Pamir where they gazed out at 20,000 foot peaks and the snow was down to 16,000 feet. When it reached the floor of the valley, all work on transporting material by yaks would have to stop for another year. It was now mid- September. By September 21, a long yak train of 43 yaks loaded with building supplies arrived in Gozkhon. Sixty Kirghiz men flung themselves into the task of assisting eight masons from the Charpurson Valley. They worked fourteen hours a day to build the foundation and roof frame. This grueling pace lasted until September 28 when the school was finished. The covenant had been fulfilled.(1)

Greg and his faithful team recognized the need for hospitality and the chance to make a difference not just for their country but for girls in remote villages both in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Did they not act in a way that saved others whose chance at an education would never have happened without the belief of the villagers and a man who was willing to fight for those beliefs through the CAI.

As a pastoral counselor, I often see people who seem lost in the material concerns of this world and, yet, feel spiritually bankrupt. Especially for women, our society tends to place value on them only in terms of what they produce and when they can not any longer fall into a deep depression.

Finding the faith to trust God to work in their lives becomes critical. Scripture tells us that we are made in the image of God and that what he made was and is good. For these women, learning to do something that they enjoy, while saying that they are fine as they are, is the beginning of an inner belief in themselves as God believes in them. Zacchaeus was surprised when Jesus stopped the greeted him despite all that he was and asked him to let him stay with him that night. Does not God do the same with each of us? Do we see ourselves as God sees us or only as a reflection of how others see or label us? As the women begin to value themselves, they are able to risk letting God enter into their hearts and to use them for good. Reminding them that God walks with them in the good and not so good times. Giving thanks for the blessing that occur during the day also helps them focus on what is possible and not on that which seems impossible.

Greg's accomplishments remind us that from a small amount of hope and belief great things can happen especially if the cause is just and good. May God help us to be his hands and voice to a needy world. Let us live into God's view of us not be limited by the view of those around us.

1. Greg Mortenson, *Stones into Schools*, (New York: Viking, 2009), 371-374

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