

## “Living the Full Life Wherever You Are”

**Theme: Values and Yearnings - The Keys to Life**

Sermon Scripture: John 15:9-17, Luke 19:1-10

**Family Activity for the Week:** As a family, talk about how you can love others. Discuss each person’s unique gifts and abilities. How can those be used to share love with those who are sad or lonely? Hungry or homeless? Disabled or widowed? Outcast or Bullied? How can those same gifts be combined with those of other family members to serve and help? Using construction paper, create the symbol of a heart. On it, write or draw the gifts of each person. Also write or draw about how they can be used to love others. Pray together, asking God to help guide you to use your ideas and gifts. Thank God for giving them to you. Display your family’s “heart” as a reminder to love all people.

**Monday, November 18** – Read Luke 3:7-14. No one really enjoys paying taxes—but few of us would group IRS workers with the worst people in our culture by saying “tax collectors and sinners.” Things were different in Jesus’ day. Tax collectors were viewed as traitors. For assessment purposes, tax collectors could search anything except Roman women. Any property not properly declared could be taken. That’s why Luke wrote a note of surprise: “Even tax collectors came to be baptized.”

- Historian and scholar N. T. Wright noted, “Some of the tolls were levied simply at the whim of local rulers, shamelessly lining their pockets and giving the collectors tacit license to do the same. John doesn’t say they should stop working for the hated rulers.... But they must earn their living and no more. No getting rich at the expense of their own people.” Are there practices in our economy that we could call “getting rich at the expense of their own people”? How easy or hard do you find it to not take part in those practices?
- Wright added that, “If [John’s teachings] were obeyed they would demonstrate that people meant business. None of these things happen by chance; they only occur when people have genuinely repented of the small-scale injustices which turn a society sour.” Do you agree that even small-scale injustices “turn a society sour”? What occasions do you have to be “salt” and “light” (cf. Matthew 5:13-16) to make society better, not more sour?

**Prayer:** *Lord God, John called even tax collectors to change their hearts and lives. That wasn’t easy—they grew rich at the expense of their own people. Give me willingness to make even hard life changes to which you call me. Amen.*

**Tuesday, November 19** – Read Luke 18:9-14. In Jesus’ day, tax collectors were among the last people expected to live in God’s Kingdom. But Jesus’ story said a tax collector’s humble faith (“struck his chest” was a gesture of sorrow) was more spiritually powerful than a Pharisee’s swollen ego. Luke said Jesus told this story “to certain people who had convinced themselves that they were righteous and who looked on everyone else with disgust.” The Pharisee in this story didn’t trust in God’s mercy. It never crossed his mind that he needed it!

- Are you more often like the Pharisee, sure your goodness lifts you above most other people, or like the tax collector, feeling a deep inner sense of need for God’s mercy? How can taking in God’s love and grace help you maintain a healthy awareness of your spiritual need without having contempt either for others or for yourself?
- At today’s end, spend time in prayer reviewing the day through God’s eyes. Use these questions to guide your prayer: at what points today did I feel better than someone else? How did that affect the way I related to them? Were there any times today when I felt badly about myself? Did I determine to handle that myself, or did I realize my deep need for God’s grace? Did I turn to God to seek the grace I needed?

**Prayer:** *O God, Hebrews 4:16 invited me to come before you “with confidence,” not because I’m good, but because you are. Help me live confident of your grace, but never arrogant about my goodness. Amen.*

**Wednesday, November 20** – Read Luke 19:1-7. Jesus openly bucked social boundaries, saying, “Zacchaeus, come down at once. I must stay in your home today.” He offered this outcast man personal friendship and kindness, made real as he accepted Zacchaeus’ hospitality. No doubt when Jesus stopped under the tree and called his name, many were thinking, “Now Zacchaeus is going to catch it.” They grumbled when, instead, Jesus just went to eat at Zacchaeus’ house (verse 7). But Jesus knew love and kindness, not harsh condemnation, were more likely to redirect Zacchaeus’ life.

- In verse 3, Zacchaeus “was trying to see who Jesus was.” By verse 6 (maybe after nearly falling out of the tree in surprise when Jesus spoke to him!), he was “happy to welcome Jesus.” What role, if any, did curiosity play in drawing you to consider Jesus’ claim on your life? What can you do, individually or through your church’s ministries, to create healthy curiosity in others about your faith? In what ways can you and your congregation make it clear that we serve a Lord who welcomed (and welcomes) “sinners”?
- Zacchaeus, “a ruler among tax collectors, was rich.” That wasn’t the result of hard, honest, productive work. Zacchaeus probably hired those who collected taxes and would set collection policies. These factors

(Message Notes and Meditation Moments for November 16-17, 2019 – For more, go to [www.fumcdurango.org](http://www.fumcdurango.org))

would have made him wealthy even had he behaved ethically—but he had not (v. 8). Tax collectors paid Rome a secret, fixed amount—everything else they collected was theirs. What does it tell you about Jesus that he would risk his reputation to reach out to an unlovely, unloved man like Zacchaeus?

**Prayer:** *Lord God, at whatever points you call my name, help me respond as Zacchaeus did, happy to welcome you into another aspect of my life. Amen.*

**Thursday, November 21** – Read Luke 19:8-10. Jesus did many admirable things during his ministry on earth. He healed the sick, broke down barriers of prejudice and exclusion, and taught people how to live better lives by accepting God as their true king. He told the grumbling crowd (many of whom Zacchaeus had probably cheated) that he “came to seek and save the lost.” That was his central, guiding mission—to restore and set right all the brokenness created by evil.

- Was Zacchaeus more of a “success,” a wealthier man, at the start of this story, or at its end? You know the answer you’re “supposed” to give. But honestly, how do you define your own “wealth” and “success”? Would you ever even consider giving up as much as Zacchaeus did if you sensed that the Lord Jesus was asking you to do that?
- In Luke 19:10, Jesus said he “came to seek and save the lost.” Scholar William Barclay wrote, “In the New Testament ‘lost’ does not mean damned or doomed. It just means in the wrong place.... A man is lost when he has wandered away from God; and he is found when once again he takes his rightful place as an obedient child in the...family of his Father.” Were you ever “lost”? If so, in what ways did God help you be “found”? How can you join God in helping others who are lost find their way home?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, thank you for coming “to seek and save the lost,” including me. Help me to join you in doing that. Amen.*

**Friday, November 22** - Read Matthew 9:9-10. Most Jews in Jesus’ day expected God to send a political and military king, the Messiah, to free them violently from Roman occupation. Jesus’ kind of ministry simply didn’t fit. Jesus didn’t see Matthew as a traitor and outcast—he saw one of his “sheep” in need of his inclusive love (cf. Luke 15:1-7). He called Matthew, and Matthew left behind his predatory, profitable tax collecting to follow Jesus. Jesus transformed Matthew from a taker into a giver of salvation who changed many lives, particularly by writing the Gospel of Matthew.

- With whom do you identify in this passage? The outcast Matthew? The judgmental Pharisees? The merciful, kind Jesus? Maybe all three at different times? How can you grow in your ability to see people not through the filters of judgment, prejudice or fear, but through Jesus’ kind, loving, and merciful eyes?
- At first, this story might look out of place. It falls in a whole section of stories about healing miracles. For Matthew, Jesus’ readiness to accept him and his friends must have been one of the most healing moments of his life. Have there been times when, in big or small ways, you felt despised or rejected? How can Jesus’ pattern of extending love and kindness to everyone bring healing to those hurting parts of your life?

**Prayer:** *Lord God, you come to me when I’m busy at my daily tasks, as you came to Matthew. I pray that I may always be as ready to respond as he was when your eternal love and compassion break into my daily routine. Amen.*

**Saturday, November 23** – Read Matthew 9:11-13. For many self-righteous religious leaders in Jesus’ day, the hardest thing to understand about Jesus was not some obscure statement, but his crystal-clear message that God loves and has compassion for all people—including those they called “sinners.” In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson captured how today’s text might sound in modern English: “They had a fit, and lit into Jesus’ followers. ‘What kind of example is this from your Teacher, acting cozy with crooks and riffraff?’ Jesus, overhearing, shot back, ‘Who needs a doctor: the healthy or the sick? Go figure out what this Scripture means: ‘I’m after mercy, not religion.’ I’m here to invite outsiders, not coddle insiders.’” We may not fully understand some things about Jesus—but his kingdom’s central “good news” is clear. And for all of us who are willing to recognize our standing as “sinners,” it’s incredibly good news.

- In Jesus’ day, as in ours, some religious people thought holiness meant displaying your virtue by loudly condemning “unworthy” people. Jesus bluntly told the upset Pharisees, “I didn’t come to call righteous people, but sinners.” Of course, that took in the whole human family (cf. Romans 3:23). Scholar Hans Küng wrote, “A Church that will not accept the fact that it consists of sinful men and exists for sinful men becomes hard-hearted, self-righteous, inhuman...though it is true that the Church must always dissociate itself from sin, it can never have any excuse for keeping any sinner at a distance.” Make it personal: are you open to the truth that, to include you, the church must accept and welcome a sinner in Jesus’ name?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, thank you for including me among the people you are eager to dine with. Keep me focused on you as the source of the goodness I see in my life. Amen.*