

This weekend, most people are celebrating Halloween, although I imagine there are a lot of Sand Pointers celebrating a Husky win over AZ last night, and perhaps a few are celebrating the Cardinals winning the World Series. What do you imagine our Lutheran friends are celebrating today in worship? The opening hymn should give you a clue. On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther challenged the Roman Catholic Church's theology of salvation and sacraments, thus initiating what is known as the Protestant Reformation.

It is curious that the label that became attached to the followers of this movement was Protestant. The people who followed Luther were not referred to as "Reformists," rather the name that stuck was "Protestant." Luther and his followers were protesters first, and perhaps reformers later—they stood up against the religious conventions of the day, arguing on behalf of those suffering under religious, social, and economic oppression. These religious protesters accused the church of their day of being too rich, too political, having sold its soul to the powerful and elite of the day. The original Protestant impulse was to resist powers of worldly dominion and domination in favor of the power of God's spirit to transform human hearts and society. Protestants were not content with the status quo. They knew things were not right. And they set out to change the world.

But what happens when there are injustices in the world, and all we do is protest, without the healing balm of reform? At the heart of the Protestant Reformation was the affirmation: "the church is always reforming, always re-formed." To have a Reformation faith is to move forward, rather than backward-looking, it is evolving rather than static.

Today, we could protest many injustices in the world, and one of the movements that has caught fire in the last month is Occupy Wall Street. This movement has ignited the hearts of millions around the nation, perhaps the world. People from many different walks of life are joining the movement.

When we look at the gospel text for today, we can see a parallel. First century Jews would have thought of Zacchaeus in much the same way as many people think of Wall Street executives and hedge fund managers. Zacchaeus is not the ordinary kind of tax collector that appears in so many other scenes with Jesus in the Gospels; he is the *chief* tax collector, and he is rich. His wealth derives from the fact that he is an entrepreneur who has successfully bid for a contract with the Roman gov't to collect taxes and tolls in a given area, and then farms out the actual collecting to others who pay him a fee for the job. He joins forces with the imperialist Roman occupiers at the expense of his own people. You could say, he sold out. Huge betrayal to his people. He benefited from a system that lavished an exorbitant amount of wealth on a few at the expense of everyone else.

Here's the rub. Jesus entered and walked through Jericho. We could imagine Jesus entered one of the Occupy Wall Street sites. Jesus walks precisely in the places where injustice is happening. That is comforting. He was walking in Jericho, and I can imagine he's walking on Wall Street as well. And Jesus spots Zacchaeus up in the tree, and says, "Come down, come now, for I'm coming to your house today." Jesus never camped outside his office in an effort to shame him. Instead he invites himself over for dinner. By extending his hand of friendship to Zacchaeus, Jesus did the opposite of what the crowd wanted him to do. The crowd couldn't get over the fact that Jesus was going to eat in the home of "a sinner." And there is a danger still today that we demonize people as "sinners". Certainly we need to hold people accountable for their actions. And it is just as important to enter into the personal re-forming of our own house, or our own soul, lest we forget the humanity we all share. In this episode, it wasn't about protest; this was about the re-forming of Zacchaeus' heart, it was about salvation coming to his home today.

I can't help but wonder - If Jesus were walking the streets of New York today, would he be a rabble-rouser activist like he was at the temple, overthrowing tables and making a scene, or would he walk up to the CEO of Goldman Sachs and give him a hug? How can someone be an activist and protestor, and a friend of aristocrats, shall we say the 1% at the same time. Just when I think I have Jesus figured out, he throws another curveball.

Maybe it's something that was already happening in Zacchaeus' heart. He chose to climb a tree. That is a humbling act. To put this in context, can you imagine Donald Trump climbing a tree to see a superstar? It would fly so fast on YouTube, he would become the next day's fodder for Jay Leno & David Letterman. In this traditional culture, a wealthy, powerful guy like Zacchaeus didn't do stuff like that. Zacchaeus had to be willing to lose his dignity in order to see Jesus. Perhaps one of the biggest barriers that keeps us from experiencing salvation is our pride, our dignity.

There is an interesting sequence in this story as well. Jesus says, "I'm coming home with you" before Zacchaeus even thinks about repenting. Jesus doesn't say, "If you clean up your life, if you stop cheating, I'll come in." He says, "In spite of your extortion and collaboration, I'm coming to where you live. I'm coming to spend time with you. I'm coming into your life without conditions," And Zacchaeus' response? Joy. Vs 6: "He came down and welcomed him gladly." And I love what comes next. When he says, "I'm going to stop cheating people" it's like he's saying, "If you accept me like that, if you love me like that, I want to change." It's not, "I'm going to change so Jesus will love me."

It's, "Because he loves me, I want to change." That's reformation. Jesus does not say, "Now salvation will come to you." No, he says, "This is a sign that salvation has already come."

Reformation was about no longer being insulated from God. It was about removing masks and removing barriers and being free to connect with God. Salvation being not an event but a person.

Jesus says "Today salvation has come to this house. . . . For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost." Jesus keeps passing along, but not passing us by.