

Kailua Christian Church
Sunday Message
Sun. February 14, 2021
Pastor Dale Vallejo-Sanderson

“Healing, Healthy and Helping”
Vision for a new season

Healthy

*Where changes to love God and others better
are encouraged and developed*

“He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there 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 began 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.” Luke 19:1-10

Sozo (Save); *A. Eternal assurance of belonging to Christ forever.*

B. Wholeness, healing

I still feel a sting of shame and regret when I tell the story of my flunking 9th grade. I was not in drugs, fights or hurting others. I did not ditch out of class. I was just an average student, kind of friendly to most. I did some messing around here and there, a screwball with rascal trouble making, mostly harmless pranks. I made jokes in class, dodged school homework when at all possible. I lived with little sense of the consequences of my lack of effort or attention in school, I am certain to my parent’s exasperation.

Ninth grade went this way until one day my math teacher, Mr. Macky, had had enough. We had developed a kind of antagonistic way with each other. I now squirm in disbelief at my rudeness and inappropriate confidence as I share this with you. On this one day, his comments were jarringly mean, it seemed to me. I did my best to retaliate in kind. Before I knew it, he had me outside the classroom by my shirt collar. I was there shoved up against the wall, as he leaned in breathing promises of great pain with a clenched fist an inch from my face. Mr. T. our V.P. soon joined the intensity to impress upon me that I was not going to get far with this way that I was choosing. A few short months later my classmates moved across the street to begin high school. I trudged through another year of 9th grade pained with a self-imposed humiliation. I had Mr. Macky for ninth grade math once again. He often called on me, with what seemed to me to be a grin of relished delight, to answer math questions up front. He regularly reminded the class that I finally got it right this second time around. He often made a point to belittle my mistakes asking how many times I will need to redo ninth grade to get it right. I was determined to just get through this year without comment or delay, so I said nothing and just took it.

Finally, tenth grade came, I crossed the street, pretended I had been there all along with old classmates and felt free, a new year. It was the first week walking the hall, trying to be inconspicuous, when I heard a familiar voice call out my name from down the hall. It was Mr. Macky, announcing for all to hear, "Two-time Sanderson. It took him two years to cross the street." And he went on loudly about how everyone else came right over, "but not two-time Sanderson." He called me over, I went to try to get close, so he didn't yell and expose my embarrassment. He grabbed me by the back of my neck, drew me once more within an inch of his face. Just loud enough to sink into my soul, he whispers, "you are a loser, always was, and always will be." With that he shoved me along. The rock of hate that at least I had to stand on, now melted away into the certainty that I was as he said, a loser.

Unknown to me at the time, it was by the grace of God that I met some kind students who accepted me, treated me as one who was ok. A nice girl invited me and some friends to a weekly Christian outreach gathering called Young Life. It was there that I heard about Jesus for the first time in my life. Over time, in bible study groups and open conversations, I could ask questions, sort through my struggles and eventually opened my heart to Jesus. I found that He loved me and began a change by love for love that continues to this day.

Two years later I was in my senior year of high school, finally. The senior class ran the concession stand under the stadium seats during the football season. This one Friday, I was with a handful of swimming and water polo teammates after the game. The bright football field lights cast a clear distinct line. In one moment, you are in the glaring lights, next step you are in the stark dark of night.

Just as we passed the concession stand and right at the edge of the light to dark line, we heard that familiar shout of Mr. Macky. "Hey aren't you seniors, get over here and help put all this away." I was senior class president, had served many Fridays in the concession stand, and knew we had many volunteers with him earlier. They must have had enough of Mr. Macky and left him stranded. A certain delight began to rise up from my gut. "No way, old man" one of my friends yelled, showing remarkable bravery. "You good for nothing punks." Mr. Macky yelled back. Then his fatal mistake, "Come closer, I can't tell who you are." This set off a flurry of cuss words, animal names and well, you can imagine the barrage of attacks in this anonymous moment. I had not said anything yet.

Most of my friends had stepped into the cover of night on their way to our cars, continuing their slew of verbal attacks. Part of me wanted to join them. Yet, I could not take that step across the line. Something held me there, as if asking me what will I choose. This is a man who I carried as a buried wound of deep hate and resentment in my heart. I had never spoken with anyone of his words and the hurt it left me with. Now, he and all he had said was before me. Will I wound him as I have been wounded? Or will I forgive him as Christ has forgiven and welcomed me?

I said goodbye to my friends, and they laughed. I walked to Mr. Macky, began loading up the popcorn machine, soda canisters and all that was left into the truck. He spent the next hour and half running down all the shortcomings, flaws and wasted lives of my generation. Somewhere in the time there I smiled with a relief of freedom I never thought possible. I actually felt bad for him. No longer did I feel the jabs of doubts or agony of wounds that his words haunted me with from that day in the hall. I knew in a new way I was loved and belonged to Jesus, and He was healing and changing me.

Zacchaeus was a man who had created his own isolation openly displayed as he perched on the branches of the tree. He was not well liked because of his choice to work with and for the conquering rule of Rome. Zacchaeus collected taxes from all who came and went about their lives. What was owed to Rome, he collected. It was common for persons in his position to become wealthy by the extra in taxes they would keep for themselves, under the protection of the guards, as Zacchaeus was known for doing. His life choices of personal gain over the well-being and even livelihood of his neighbors and community had created great anger and animosity among those he lived in the village with towards him.

That Jesus would call on Zacchaeus by name, of all people, not to condemn or belittle, but to invite Himself to come to Zacchaeus house is a remarkable and for some a disturbing thing. For Zacchaeus, it brought an immediately delighted response of freedom from his tree of isolation. For the crowd, who had lived under the oppressive ways of Zacchaeus, Jesus' actions seemed unfair, uncalled for and misdirected. Yet, in the wisdom and power of Jesus' way, love dramatically changed Zacchaeus personally and publicly.

Christ's healthy change comes when I ...

I. Pursue a good curiosity about Christ

‘A man was there 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’ Luke 19:2-4

A good curiosity about Christ leads us in the seeking and searching of our soul. Curiosity compels us to seek out who Christ is, what He is about and how He makes a difference in our lives.

It may begin as a simple curiosity to explore what others have said or shown. Yet in God's way and work, He will lead us to an encounter of knowing in our hearts some of the incredible truths and experiences of His love and life-giving way. Good curiosity moves us past our complacency. When we are simply going along, though we know or at least hope there is more, yet we just are not doing much to take new steps. Pursuing a good curiosity about Christ, begins an adventure of new life with Christ from the staleness we have come to settle into.

Good curiosity about Christ moves us through the fears that hold us. Christ guides us to an alternative of other real life-giving ways of seeing the possibilities. In good curiosity, Christ gives us the assurances of not being alone in our desperateness.

Jesus came to seek us out, give us the strength and peace over what holds us stuck in our quiet aloneness. A good curiosity about Christ is an open invitation for Him to call out to us, so He may meet us where we are.

- ***What challenge in your life could you pursue Christ about with a good curiosity?***

Christ's healthy change comes when I ...

II. Embrace Christ's embrace of unconditional love and acceptance

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.” Luke 19:5-6

The power of Christ's unconditional love and acceptance can only truly change our lives when we humbly leave our place of safety, familiarity, protection, and own control to welcome Him. That we take Christ's invitation personally, about you and me, can seem the most self-absorbed thing in the world, or the humblest step of simply letting go of our resistance and letting Him embrace with our embrace.

That Christ came, lived, died, and rose again is made significant to God's greatest hope, when we receive Him, just as we are. This is the root of all good change in our lives with Christ. Never have we outgrown the wonder of His embrace brought back to us in the quiet moments, the fullness of life and laughter moments, in the deep recesses of pain and doubt, He calls us to come down, come forward, come be with Him, and He with us.

- **What is your best moment of knowing Christ unconditional love and acceptance? If none comes to mind, how about asking for a moment like that right now.**

Christ's healthy change comes when I ...

III. Commit to live and give to others like Christ

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.” Luke 19:8-10

The embrace of Christ's unconditional love and acceptance changed Zacchaeus. He was transformed from a man who lived seemingly, singularly for his own benefit at great cost to those around him. His work as a tax collector allowed him the power to take as he pleases while creating oppressive hardships for others. It is a dramatic picture, worth seeking connection with our own lives. Some of us have lived under the oppressive ways of misused power. Some of us have been the ones wielding unhealthy power over others. We are often encouraged to find meaning, value, and purpose in comparison to others. Often, we are driven for distraction from our emptiness of soul with accomplishment, accumulation, and accolades.

Christ's love penetrated the heart, soul, and mind of Zacchaeus to the point that his whole value system of living was turned upside down. The resources he had he now saw were to be used to care for others, lift the weight of trials off people, to make it right with those he had wronged and restore them to a better life.

Christ's embrace of unconditional love and acceptance changes everything, while starting right where we are. His unconditional love and acceptance does not mean He agrees with everything we do or are about. Yet He knows when His embrace is welcomed into the deep ways of our heart, mind, and soul, we are healed and compelled to live for good, His way, with His heart. His love creates the strength to make healthy changes with our lives.

- **What healthy change might you commit to to live and give like Christ?**