

Reflections for August 30th – 12th Sunday after Trinity

Jesus and the Tax Man

Tax Inspectors or collectors are not usually considered the most favourite of our contacts. Indeed, whether they are full inspectors or just assistants does not make much difference. However, before I was married one of the church congregation was just such an Inspector and he was a very pleasant man. After I qualified as a Chartered Accountant, I decided to specialise in tax giving advice to clients about how much tax they had to pay. The clients naturally thought I would reduce the amount they paid but this of course was only within the limits of the law. I did not advise anything illegal and usually advice was in order that clients would know what to expect if they took certain actions.

I don't know what sort of taxation was paid in Jesus' time but it is unlikely to have been a very sophisticated system, although it was a system set up by the Roman government. That of course made any tax collector very unpopular as he was working for an enemy of the Jews and I doubt that there was the equivalent of my profession available to resist the charges.

Zacchaeus as a tax collector apparently made himself more unpopular by charging more tax than the system allowed. Perhaps his attitude was if he was an unpopular person anyway, would taking a little extra make him less unpopular?

However, when he knew Jesus was coming to his home town he made great efforts to see him. No doubt as an unpopular man he was not getting any help from the folk waiting for Jesus so, as he was a small man, he climbed a tree so he could at least see Jesus. We do not know if Jesus knew Zacchaeus before the encounter but Zacchaeus knew Jesus and wanted to know more about him. So, Jesus' request for an invitation to dinner was welcomed by him. That meeting changed his life completely. He promised not to overcharge tax in the future and would give back four times all he had wrongly collected and give half of his wealth to the poor.

This all seems to raise the question, how many of us want to meet Jesus. If we do meet him what difference does it make to us? Are we prepared to give half our wealth to the poor? Are we ready to make good anyone who has suffered by our actions perhaps not financially? What difference will it make to our lives?

Jeremy Hopkinson

Heavenly Father may we be enthusiastic
in looking for your Son in our everyday lives
and when we find may we seek to know
how we should answer the question
of using our gifts to further your kingdom.
Amen.

Bible reading: Luke 19: 1-10