

Tend and Transform

Raising taxes has been a burning issue in our political scene for some time especially over the last few weeks. In case, we think this is a new issue, we only need to turn to the Gospels to realise that this has been around since the time of Jesus and before.

Our Gospel reading today is focused on a tax collector.

If you were a God-fearing Jew at the time of Jesus, you would have wanted nothing to do with Zacchaeus.

Tax collectors are not always the most popular people; I'm sure many are nice people. In Jesus' time, Zacchaeus was not just a tax collector; he was a collaborator. He was collecting money for the Romans. He was working with the officials of the Temple who collaborated with the Romans and so he was in fact a collaborator. He was seen as an enemy of the Jew, a turncoat.

Not someone you would want in your company.

Jesus was a Jew, so why did he want to spend time with the likes of Zacchaeus? Why did he want to stop and speak with a collaborator?

This story asks a lot of questions.

Did Jesus know Zacchaeus before this incident?

How did Jesus know he was hiding up a tree?

Well, we will never know, but what we do know is Jesus knew that he was in tree and Jesus knew that he was a man who was searching, a man who was searching for companionship and a man searching for God.

This story teaches us to never write someone off.

Zacchaeus was there that day because he wanted to know more about Jesus. He wanted, like many, to know about the Kingdom of God, and like the rich young man who came to Jesus and said, *how do I get eternal life?* I'm sure that Zacchaeus had similar questions.

So, Jesus reaches out to him.

Under the sycamore tree, he stands and he looks up, and invites Zacchaeus down to have fellowship with Jesus.

In that moment, we see Jesus doing two things.

Firstly, he is showing care and fellowship.

Secondly, he is reaching out to those on the margins of his community.

This morning, we are thinking about another two Marks of Mission. They are Tend and Transform. At the heart of Jesus' ministry are those two words, and our story today focuses upon them.

At the heart of the 5 Marks of Mission and at the heart of the Cadder Growth Plan lie those two Marks of Mission – Tend and Transform.

Jesus reaches out to Zacchaeus and tends to his needs. Jesus sees a man who is lonely, a man in need of community; a man who is broken, a man in need of being made whole again; a man who knows that he is a sinner and so a man in need of forgiveness.

As Jesus invites him down from the tree and invites himself to go to Zacchaeus's house – Jesus builds a bridge between the two of them. There is this beautiful connection between the two men. Now we can't see Zacchaeus but at some point, a change comes over Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus on the inside begins to change.

Zacchaeus responds to Jesus' call and for the first time knows the love of God in his life.

Then later in his house, he makes a declaration that his life has been transformed. That he was leaving the unjust structures of the profession that he had been involved in. He was quitting his day time job and in fact he was not only quitting, but he was giving away half of his belongings to the poor, and the rest - well he was going to pay back four times as much to all he had cheated.

I'm sure that there was a queue at his door the next day!

Those two Marks of Tend and Transform are consistent with Jesus' ministry and mission, and that at the heart of his Gospel, his message of Good News is all about tending and transforming.

Two weeks ago, we considered Teach and Tell, which are vital Marks of Mission and I shared ways that we are going to develop those Marks of Mission in our Cadder Growth Plan.

This week our two Marks are Tend and Transform.

The convenor of those two Marks is Janet Johnstone and the team leaders of care and fellowship are Janet and Pat Marwick.

Their team remit is as follows.

Care & Fellowship

- Identify where care is needed around the church and develop ways in which to respond to that need
- Support the Minister in delivering pastoral care to members and those known to the church in need of loving service
- Develop warm intergenerational fellowship opportunities around the church to grow and enrich church life.
- Support existing fellowship groups and activities around the church

Pat and Janet have a team around them to help fulfil this remit and if you would like to be part of this team then please approach them, because it's a big remit and they need many people to help them fulfil it. You can be a team member or a supporter of their team.

Jesus identified where care was needed. Often for Jesus it was the edge of society that he reached out to. Who would have thought that Jesus could transform a hated man, hiding in a tree, into becoming a disciple and follower of Christ and the ways of peace?

The Zacchaeus story asks the important question – who in our communities are hidden away? Who are not visible? Who are struggling but do not know where to turn to?

If I took you to certain areas of Glasgow, you would know immediately the challenges and needs of that community but perhaps for us, they are not so visible.

With the energy crisis, the increase in interest rates, mortgages rising, money a lot tighter, perhaps these needs will become more visible in our community.

Where are the areas of need in our community that we can identify to and reach out and develop ways to respond to that need?

For that is where the church grows. The church grows when people's lives are changed and touched through grace, just like Zacchaeus.

That is what this team is all about. We do acknowledge that there are already good outreaches happening and we want to build on those, but we also need to involve more people and give everyone who feel called the opportunity to reach out to explore local human needs.

The other part of these Marks of Mission is to explore opportunities to transform unjust structures, and we do that under the heading of **Community & World Outreach**, and the team leaders are Rebecca Wallace and Mary Livingstone.

Their remit is:

- Develop ways to inform our parish about what the church offers and create 'on ramps' to encourage our local community into church life; e.g. community fellowship events; opening up the church to the community
- Explore opportunities to reach out to our community to meet local human needs and address inequalities; e.g. food bank support; Woman's Aid support
- Explore opportunities to contribute to the transformation of unjust structures in society, locally and globally; e.g. supporting Christian Aid

This is the Church reaching out locally and globally, following the example of Jesus, to identify the need and to seek ways to challenge others. But notice how Jesus did it, for this is important. He did it quietly, gracefully, and he did it with great love.

Our politicians today would do well to look at Jesus' leadership. It was a leadership that was based on being a servant. Often what we see in political debates today, like the first debate in Parliament of our new prime minister, is who can shout the loudest, debate the strongest or say the most hurtful words to another.

Jesus changes unjust structures by changing people's hearts and a lot more of this needs to happen in those that lead us in government. Humility and acceptance of our weaknesses would go a great way into making a great leader.

Jesus was the greatest leader in all history. 2000 years later and he is still calling people to walk in his ways and follow him.

His mission is still going today. Caesar, Nero, Alexander and all the leaders and heroes of the past, had their day, but Jesus' legacy exists forever.

But we need all to play our part, everyone needs to support this new structure at Cadder in whatever way they can, whether that's praying, supporting events, being part of a team or leading a team; it will involve us all, as we seek to build a church that will survive this storm, and will be a place of blessing, not just for now but for the future.

We need to make our church sustainable and to make it a place where people want to belong because they see in us the way of Jesus.

At the heart of every thriving church is the Gospel, the Good News, for this is God's plan. If we don't have the Gospel message, as our heartbeat, then the heartbeat of the church will slowly die.

We are currently working out our Growth Plan, and after the Kirk Session gets an opportunity to discuss and agree it we will bring it to the congregation in the early part of the year, as a way forward for Cadder Church.

If you would like more detail about this, please get in touch with myself or Gillian or Dianne, and we will gladly share with you.

In the meantime, please pray for our Church, for our mission, for our growth, for the way forward, that we may indeed, in the words of Jesus make God's will in Heaven, ours on earth.

Amen