

## “Family” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Richard Robertson Memorial – April 23, 2022

- I. **To all of Richard’s family here today**, though not by blood, but in Christ – grace peace and mercy are yours through our living Savior, Jesus Christ.
- a. The word of God that engages us today is **Luke 19:9-10** - <sup>9</sup> And Jesus said to [Zacchaeus], “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”
  - b. As many of you know, Richard had a nickname, “Zach” because of his small stature.
    - i. I don’t remember him climbing any trees to see events going on, but I wouldn’t put it past him 😊
  - c. I met Richard when I first got here in 2007 as a vicar, and he had already been a member for a few years...
  - d. One of the first chances I got to know him was on our trip to Israel and the Holy Land that year.... Which you will see many pictures of him on the table out front
    - i. As we traveled all over the place, it was truly the trip of a lifetime for him (and all of us for that matter) – but an image comes to mind...
      1. On the cover of your bulletins is the Sea of Galilee... and I distinctly remember taking a boat ride and Richard sitting up at the helm just pondering the place where Jesus spent much of His life.
      2. Richard’s pictures from most of you include his Holy Land trips.
      3. And as we found out later, he really didn’t have the money to go on these trips – but I’m glad he did – as it must have strengthened his faith...
      4. In fact, in his last hours, Richard called around to various church members – and one call was to Dave Oswald – who reminded him of climbing Mt Sinai and watching the sunrise
  - e. When it came to the rest of his time, it was obvious that Richard spent most of it around the church... whether it was ushering, running the camera, helping to set things up... he was a fixture at every service.
    - i. When I say every service, I honestly don’t remember him missing many services – he came to early and late each Sunday, early and late for midweek services, and all the funerals and special services we had.
    - ii. For years and years, Richard was at the church to set things up, unlock the doors, run the sound and video system, and make the coffee.
      1. I tell this story, not to make anyone feel bad, but when Covid came around, Richard was not around much either... and when we got started with regular services again, other people had to

step in and open the church along with make the coffee... and let's just say there were some growing pains!

- a. It seemed like quite an emergency situation when I got here – no one knew just how much he was doing to get things started...
- iii. Yes, for many years, Richard was like a permanent fixture here in service to his Lord... whether it was mission trips, Human Care activities, singing in the choir, helping with Property Management or helping to set up for all the events...
- f. And yet, none of that got our friend to heaven.
  - i. Sure, Richard was a great servant of the Lord, but his service was just a response to the grace and acceptance God showed him first.

## II. **In the Gospel lesson, Jesus is in the old city of Jericho.**

- a. A man named Zacchaeus, a very wealthy tax collector, has already heard about this man, Jesus... and he wants to get a better look.
- b. Being a short guy, kind of like Richard, Zacchaeus climbs up a sycamore tree to see over the crowd.
  - i. And Jesus, being Jesus, looks right at him and tells him to get down from there, it's time that I go (or abide) at your house.
  - ii. Now Zacchaeus was a rich man, but as Jesus chose him, faith changed his attitude toward wealth – and the fruit of faith was a response to God's grace... paying back all the people he swindled
  - iii. The best part is when the Pharisees were mad at Jesus for eating with such a bad guy – and what does Jesus say?
    1. Salvation has come to this house, not because this guy claims his heritage from Abraham's genetics... but because of faith!
    2. Zacchaeus, this lowlife, no good, worthless... person... is a child of God, chosen and redeemed.
    3. Zacchaeus was found, because Jesus came to seek and save the lost.
    4. Zacchaeus was part of God's family by faith.

## III. **Richard was one of the lost that Jesus found.**

- a. Whether it was in his Baptism long ago, or whether it was when he started attending here – Richard became a part of the family by faith.
- b. What did Zacchaeus do to get Jesus to accept him?
  - i. Nothing! He was just looking to see what was going on, and Jesus found him
- c. What did Richard do to get Jesus to accept him?
  - i. Nothing! Jesus found him through the people of Ascension... who are also a part of God's family.
- d. It's a common misperception that people who serve the Lord like Richard get a fast pass to heaven because they are "so good"

e. Nope, the truth is that God first finds us, brings us to faith, and then we respond to His love with a life in service to Him.

IV. **It is very fitting that we celebrated Holy Week and Easter just last week...**

a. What we observed last week is why Richard now resides in glory.

b. Jesus, although stopping in Jericho for a short time, was actually on His way to Jerusalem...

i. The city where He would be greeted with much fanfare but die a criminal's death within a few short days.

ii. As Jesus carried that cross to His crucifixion, He had Richard... and you... and me in His heart...

1. Jesus had the weight of our sin and brokenness placed on Him, and as it says in our reading in Ephesians, "[The Father] purchased our freedom with the blood of His Son and forgave our sins" (Ephesians 1:7)

iii. The best part is that death could not hold our Savior as He came forth from the tomb in glory – which is our story as well...

c. Richard is that lost person who Jesus found – no he wasn't worthy – but none of us are... that's what makes it all so amazing.

i. Now, Richard, our quirky little friend... is better than he's ever been.

ii. No more cancer, doctor visits, tremors, or fear of the unknown... no more financial worries or any other pain or suffering.

iii. Richard wears a white robe that's been bleached white by the blood of his Savior Jesus, and he is singing totally on key in the heavenly choir...

d. Some of you may know that Richard, in his last hours knew that death was close... so he made phone calls to several people.

i. In God's working things out, Linda Strefling went to visit him... and spent the last hours being there and comforting him.

ii. That's family... that's the body of Christ at work.

e. Richard may not have had an earthly family, but he had us – and by God's grace he experienced what it means to be in the family of faith.

f. Not only that, but he is now experiencing what it means to be God's child, a part of the family in glory. Amen.