

**Text:** [Luke 19:1-10 \(CEB\)](#)

**Date:** February 9, 2025

**Title:** Transformed by Grace – Week 1  
“Called by Love”

**Theme:** When God calls our name, it’s an invitation to transformation.

1

One of the churches I served was on a main street and I could walk to the barber shop

I remember it took a while to settle in  
I’d been going to this guy for a few months, but I didn’t really feel super comfortable

I mean, I’d sit down, the conversation would be a little awkward, he wouldn’t say much, I wouldn’t say much

Which seemed weird, because when other people were in the chair he seemed to have A LOT to say to them  
I began to feel like maybe I didn’t belong there  
But since it was right down the street, I kept going

Well, one day we got to talking about what I did for work  
And this was exactly what I DIDN’T want to talk about  
Because I figured if conversation was weird before, it would DEFINITELY get weirder now

But actually, it was just the opposite  
This guy was super into his own Catholic faith  
It was clearly important to him – and he opened up about that

And so, the next time I came in  
I was second or third in line, waiting on the chair

And the guy in the chair was telling a not-entirely-wholesome joke  
I just kind of put my head down, like, “Lord, help us”

The guy got to the punchline, and just then, without missing a  
beat, Jimmy turns to me and says –  
With exceeding joy -  
“And how are YOU today, Reverend Joe?”

That was the moment when I knew this guy was my friend  
After that, I never again felt like an outsider when I walked in his  
shop  
Because he’d just created an inside joke that we’d refer to for  
years after  
It’s funny how someone calling us by name can make that big a  
difference, isn’t it?

## 2

It made a difference for Zaccheus  
Zaccheus, who didn’t feel like he belonged anywhere  
His countrymen hated him because he worked for the Romans  
(And made a good living doing it)

But he was curious about Jesus  
Curious enough that as a grown –  
though apparently rather short –  
man he was willing to climb a tree to get a glimpse of this  
preacher

I perceive he fully intended to just observe, to remain on the  
outside, up in his tree  
That’s not what Jesus had in mind, though  
Because when Jesus calls you by name,  
something HAPPENS in you

When the Son of God stands at the base of your tree and invites himself to your house, something HAPPENS in you  
It's an INVITATION to TRANSFORMATION  
And Zaccheus WAS changed – immediately he blurts out:  
“I’m giving away half my possessions to the poor”  
“And for anyone I’ve cheated, I give four times as much”

Now, the law held that if you stole from somebody, the penalty was 20% on top of the value of what you took (Lev. 6:5)  
Under the law, fourfold restitution was reserved for an offense like sheep rustling (Ex. 22:1)

So Zaccheus is all in, even though all the people who witness this encounter immediately start to grumble about it  
They grumble about Jesus wanting to spend time with this notorious “sinner”  
And they probably grumble about Zaccheus and wonder if anything he’s promising is for real

Now the Bible doesn’t reveal anything else about how things worked out for Zaccheus  
But according to Orthodox tradition, St. Peter appointed him as Bishop of Caesarea<sup>1</sup> - he’s celebrated as a saint

### 3

When Jesus calls our names, it's an INVITATION to TRANSFORMATION  
An invitation to CHANGE  
When we realize that God’s love is not just for other people  
But for US – something happens  
Not just in us, but in the way we look at the world

Jesus called Zaccheus down from his tree  
And Zaccheus thought he was setting the table for Jesus  
But in reality, Jesus was the one setting the table for him

And on that day, Zaccheus went from being an agent of Rome to  
an agent of grace

Because those who have experienced God's transformation in  
their own lives set the table to invite others

That's what I believe faith requires

That's what Jesus was talking about when he invited people into  
the KING-dom,

Or as we like to say, the KIN-dom of God

He was talking about an ever-expanding network of relationships

An ever-widening circle of love and care and connection

In a moment when we see people wanting to tighten the circles

Jesus asks us to draw the circle wide

And in this church, I see us doing that work every day

This week, I had two conversations with folks who wanted to  
know more about how we live out our faith

I responded to an email from a local high school student who was  
reaching out specifically because he knows we are an  
affirming church

We've welcomed several new faces to our Bible study in the past  
few weeks

And members of our confirmation class shared their reading plans  
for working through the whole Bible

Later this month, we're going to celebrate a full-immersion  
baptism for a mom and her son

The world is crazy right now  
But there are people out there who are curious  
They may be hanging back  
Checking things out from up in the trees

But they are curious  
Curious about whether there's actually any kindness and  
compassion left in the world  
Curious to know what faith has to say about how we respond to  
this moment we find ourselves in  
And wondering if anyone is going to call them by name  
If anyone is going to set the table for them

Are you ready to meet them wherever they are today?  
Are you ready to set the table?

Because Jesus invites us to become agents of grace  
Who create the SPACE and set the PLACE for others

That's what I want us to be about as a church  
Because you know, when someone speaks your name in love  
It's the start of something brand new

It's an INVITATION to TRANSFORMATION  
An invitation Jesus is calling us to share with the whole world

Amen.

**By Joe Monahan, Medford UMC, Medford NJ**

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.oca.org/saints/lives/2023/04/20/148976-apostle-zacchaeus#:~:text=After%20the%20Ascension%20of%20the,Sunday%20before%20the%20Tridion%20begins>