Extravagant Welcome

Tweens will climb into the story of Zacchaeus and identify ways to follow Jesus’ example of extravagant welcome.

Preparing for the Session

Focus on Luke 19:1–10

WHAT is important to know?
Zacchaeus’s repentance demonstrates the presence of God’s salvation in the world. Jesus says to the crowds who have criticized him for associating with the (now former) tax collector, “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” (19:9–10). Zacchaeus (whose name derives from the Hebrew for “clean” or “innocent”) is in the end declared saved. Salvation has come to “his house” because he has repented, changed his ways, and come to follow Jesus. This is the very purpose of Jesus’ life and ministry, “to save the lost” (v. 10).

WHERE is God in these words?
When God calls us, we respond with faith and obedience. When Jesus calls out the name “Zacchaeus,” we can see a theological concept at work—namely, that in our divine call God names us as his own children (Gal. 3:26). This is the missiological objective of the Son of Man (Luke 19:9), who is Lord of salvation. The divinely providential initiative of Jesus illustrates that the salvation of God always begins with God. Jesus is God with us, Immanuel, who saves us because we are impotent to save ourselves (Rom. 7:19).

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?
As we try to follow Christ in worship, in our work lives, or in the marketplace, we can remember a happy saint of the church: wee Zacchaeus. We may not have to climb a tree to see Jesus above the crowd—Jesus will find us anyway. If, however, you are finding yourself tired of staring at the backs of the crowd, look for your tree to climb. If graced with a memorable encounter with God, perhaps your response will be as joyous as Zacchaeus’s and it will lead to your own kind of cheerful commitment to justice. “For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?
Zacchaeus is, at least initially, apparently motivated by curiosity, but Jesus is motivated by love. Jesus meets Zacchaeus’s curiosity with invitation and ultimately with the declaration of salvation to his house. Importantly, Jesus’ desire for Zacchaeus’s salvation flies in the face of the normal expectations of the crowd. They grumble that Jesus is the guest of a notorious sinner like Zacchaeus. Jesus’ action, however, is consistent with a frequent theme in Luke’s Gospel. Jesus time and time again acts against social expectation and religious decorum, by associating with those regarded as outcast or unclean in some sense. In seeking out Zacchaeus, Jesus demonstrates the extravagant desire of God for the salvation of the lost, that is, for our salvation.
**FOCUS SCRIPTURE**

*Luke 19:1–10*

**Focus on Your Teaching**

As children navigate the tween years, they spend a fair amount of time trying to discern who’s “in” and who’s “out.” Judging others is as natural for them as breathing. Labeling others, regrettably, gives some tweens a sense of security. Tweens know if they hang out with the “wrong” crowd, they likely will be judged and labeled as well. Tweens can also be compassionate and brave. Jesus can be their model of compassion and extravagant welcome. Encourage tweens to follow Jesus’ example, perhaps helping to make compassion an “in” thing.

_O God, give me a welcoming spirit and help me embrace these tweens as your children. Guide me as I prepare to teach. Amen._

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**LEADING THE SESSION**

**GATHERING**

*Before the session,* arrange the green fabric and Christ candle in the center of your meeting space. Cut out the symbols on Color Pack 17. If you are using option 1 in Responding, arrange to take tweens on a tour of your church building to look at areas that are entryways.

Welcome tweens, speaking to each one as he or she arrives. Ask four volunteers to be readers in the drama and give them copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Jesus and Zacchaeus) to prepare. Ask a volunteer to prepare to read aloud Luke 19:1–10.

Gather the group around the candle. Have a volunteer light the candle. Pray aloud:

_For the great love you have for us, O God, and for your world, we give you thanks and praise. Teach us to trust you and follow Jesus. Amen._

Extinguish the candle, if necessary.

Have learners pass around Color Pack 16 as you discuss:

- What can you tell about this woman from her photo?
- If this woman walked into worship at our church this morning, would she be welcomed by church members? Why or why not?

Tell learners that the Bible story today is about welcoming people.
EXPLORING

Set the scene for the story: Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem shortly before his arrest, trial, and crucifixion. He and his disciples are passing through the city of Jericho. While Jesus is in Jericho, he meets a man named Zacchaeus. Invite learners to recall what they know about the story of Zacchaeus.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Jesus and Zacchaeus). Tell learners who didn’t volunteer for reading parts that they get to play the crowd and ask them to stand in a group. Proceed to act out the story. Afterward, ask:

- What detail of the story did you notice today that you hadn’t noticed before?
- What do we know about Zacchaeus? (Refer to Resource Sheet 2 [Pharisees and Tax Collectors] from October 23 as needed to review information about tax collectors.)
- Why do you think Zacchaeus was eager to see Jesus?

Divide the emoticons cut from Color Pack 17 among the learners. Tell learners to imagine the various emotions Zacchaeus may have been experiencing as the story is read aloud. Ask the volunteer who will be reading Luke 19:1–10 aloud to pause after each verse. After each verse, learners holding an emoticon that expresses how Zacchaeus might have been feeling at that point in the story should lay it on the table. There may be more than one for some verses. Have learners pick up the emoticons before the reader continues with the next verse.

Distribute Bibles and encourage tweens to refer to Luke 19:1–10 to help them answer the following questions:

- What motivated Zacchaeus to do something as undignified as climbing a tree?
- What did Zacchaeus do after Jesus called to him to come down from the tree? (v. 6)
- How did the crowd react when Jesus called to Zacchaeus? (v. 7)
- What did Zacchaeus announce that he would do? (v. 8)
- Do you think that the people in the crowd would have welcomed Zacchaeus into their homes after his visit with Jesus? Why or why not?
- How do you explain the change in Zacchaeus?
- What kind of effect would you say Jesus had on the people around him?

Invite tweens to tell what they think of when they hear the phrase “extravagant welcome.” Wonder together how such welcome can be both an attitude and a behavior. Ask:

- In what way did Jesus offer an extravagant welcome? In what way did Zacchaeus offer an extravagant welcome?
- When might it be difficult for a person to offer an extravagant welcome?
- Jesus’ extravagant welcome led to Zacchaeus’s extravagant welcome. In baptism, Jesus showers you with extravagant and welcoming love. What might this lead you to do?
RESPONDING

Mark the options you will use:

1. **Welcome Tour** As they follow Jesus, tweens can help the church be a more welcoming place. Distribute index cards and pens. Take tweens on a tour of your church facility, stopping by each outside entrance door and places where people enter main areas such as the worship space, fellowship hall, Sunday school space, or church nursery. At each stop, ask: What makes people feel they are welcome when they are here? Invite tweens to make notes about ways to create a more extravagant sense of welcome in these various places. Return to your meeting space and compile a list of the learners’ suggestions to give to leaders in your church.

2. **Welcoming Marks** Tweens can explore to what extent color, symbol, and design may communicate a sense of welcome. Distribute Resource Sheet 2 (Welcoming Designs) and fine-tipped markers. Invite learners to color the designs as you discuss the message that each might communicate and where these designs might be used to convey a sense of welcome. Have learners choose their favorite design and use it to make a welcome sign to put up in the church or a welcome card to give to a visitor. Provide construction paper, glue sticks, and scissors for tweens to use to make their cards or signs. Option: Have tweens create their own designs on a computer and print them on iron-on transfer paper or temporary tattoo paper. Plan when and where to use these, and what to say to people who ask them about the designs.

3. **Zacchaeus Song** Tweens understand the welcoming power of music. As young children, they may have felt welcome in Sunday school as they sang “Zacchaeus Was a Wee Little Man.” Take a moment to sing the song together. Option: View a performance of this song on YouTube, such as www.youtube.com/watch?v=mV8wFANocHY. Form pairs or trios to write another stanza for this song about giving and receiving an extravagant welcome to the body of Christ. They may want to create hand motions to go with their words. Allow time for each pair or trio to present its new stanza.

CLOSING

Gather the group around the candle and light it. Invite learners to offer ideas about how they can become more welcoming to others. Sing “Glory to God” (Color Pack 27 on Singing the Feast, 2016–2017)

Pray aloud:

*Gracious and generous God, teach us how to be welcoming to all people.*

*Forgive us when we judge unfairly. Fill us with your love and change our hearts so we may recognize that each person we meet is your beloved child. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.*

Say a personal goodbye to each learner.
Jesus and Zacchaeus
—Luke 19:1-10, NRSV

Place a sturdy chair in front of the learners who are portraying the crowd. The narrator stands in front of the crowd, off to one side. Jesus begins behind the crowd and starts to come around to the front when the narrator first speaks. Zacchaeus begins across from the crowd.

Narrator: [Jesus] entered Jericho and was passing through it. (Jesus stops.) A man was there named Zacchaeus (Zacchaeus raises hand.); 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. (Zacchaeus moves quickly to the chair and stands on it.) 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,

Jesus: Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.

Narrator: So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. (Crowd makes grumbling noises.) All who saw it began to grumble and said,

Voice in the crowd: He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.

Narrator: Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord,

Zacchaeus: 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.

Narrator: Then Jesus said to him,

Jesus: 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.